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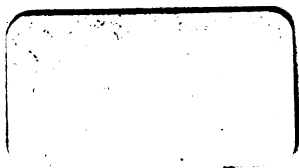
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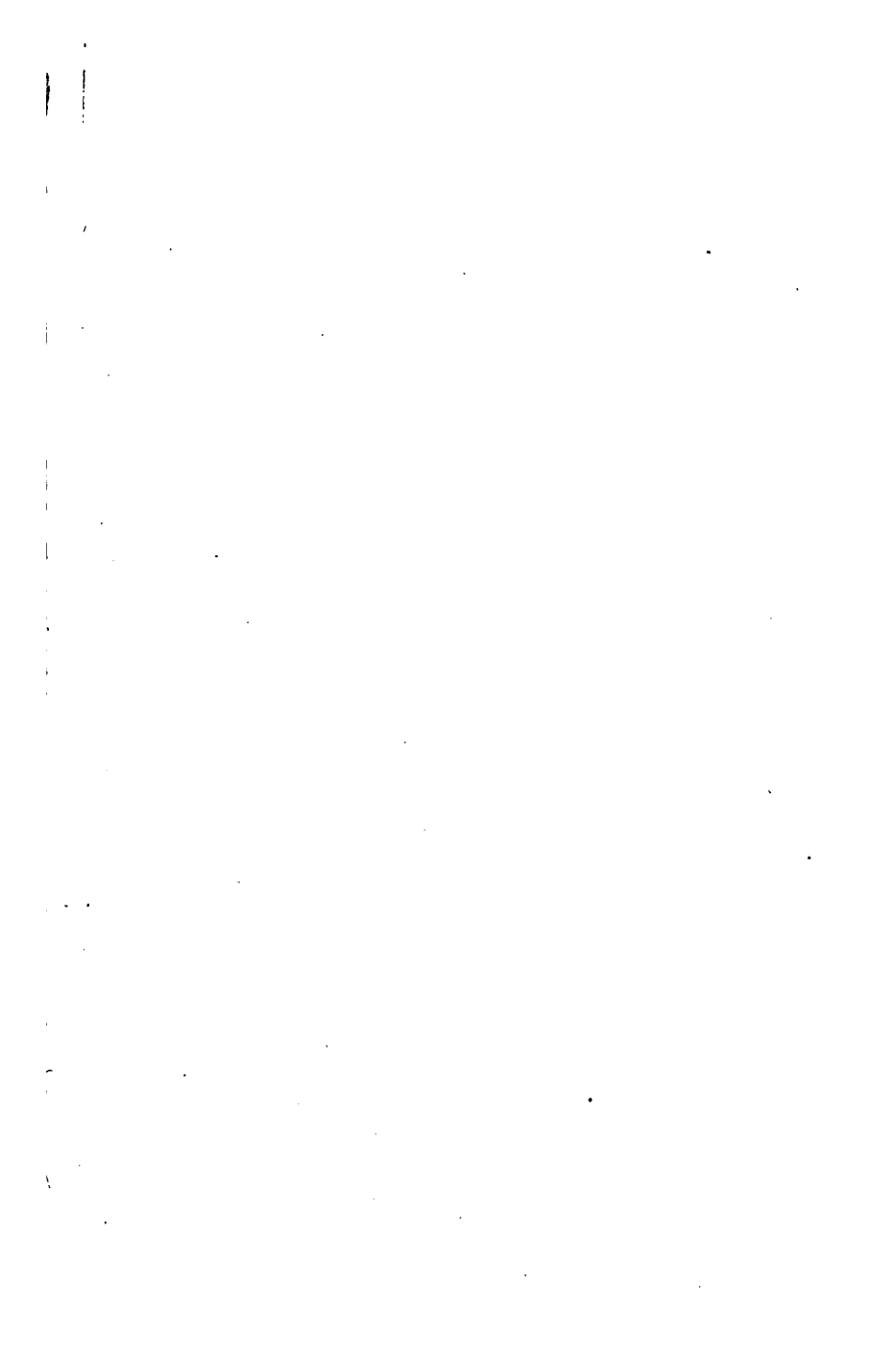
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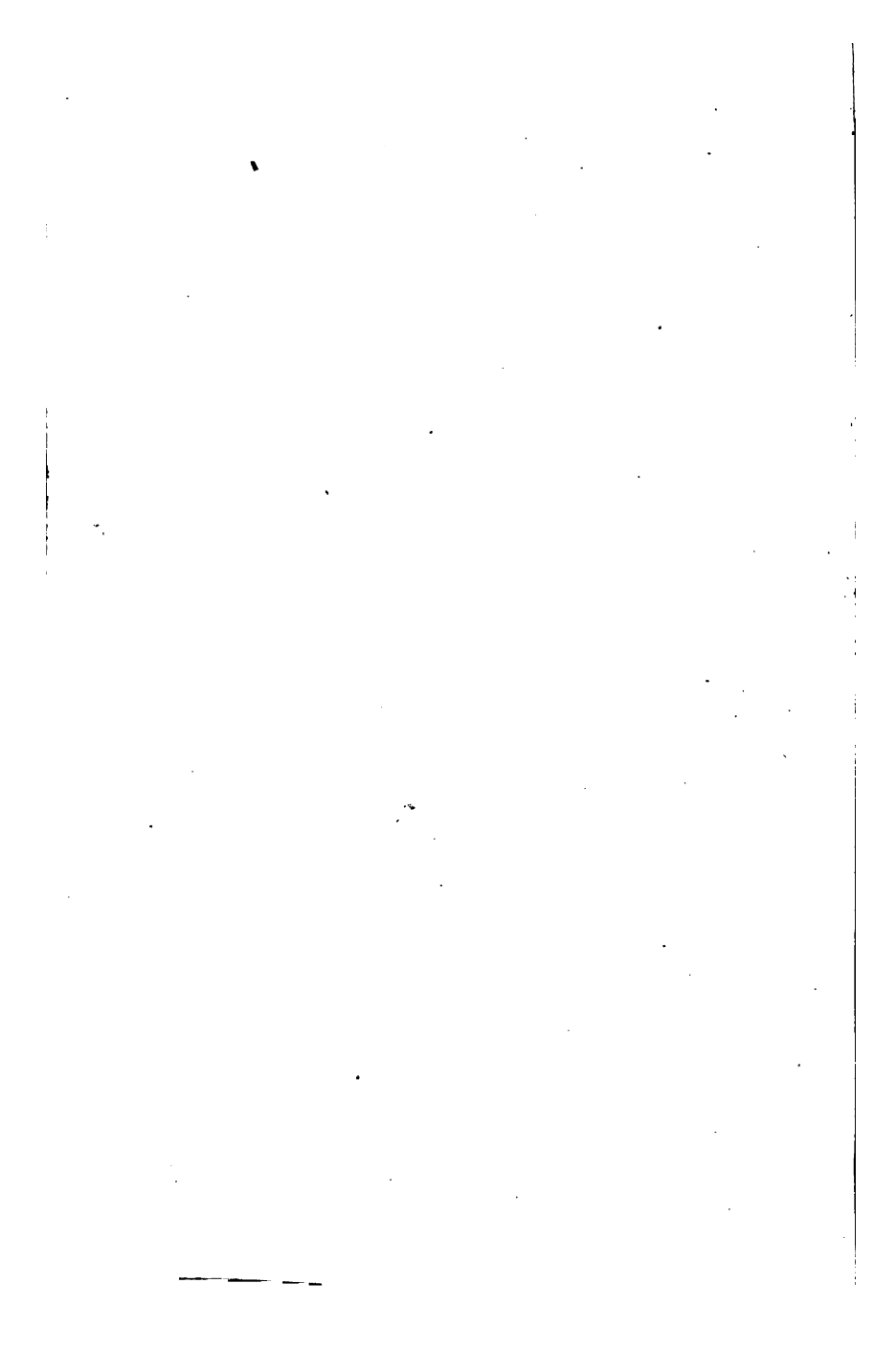
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LIVES
OF
THE ITALIAN POETS

BY
HENRY STEBBING, D.D. F.R.S.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET

Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty

1860

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LONDON

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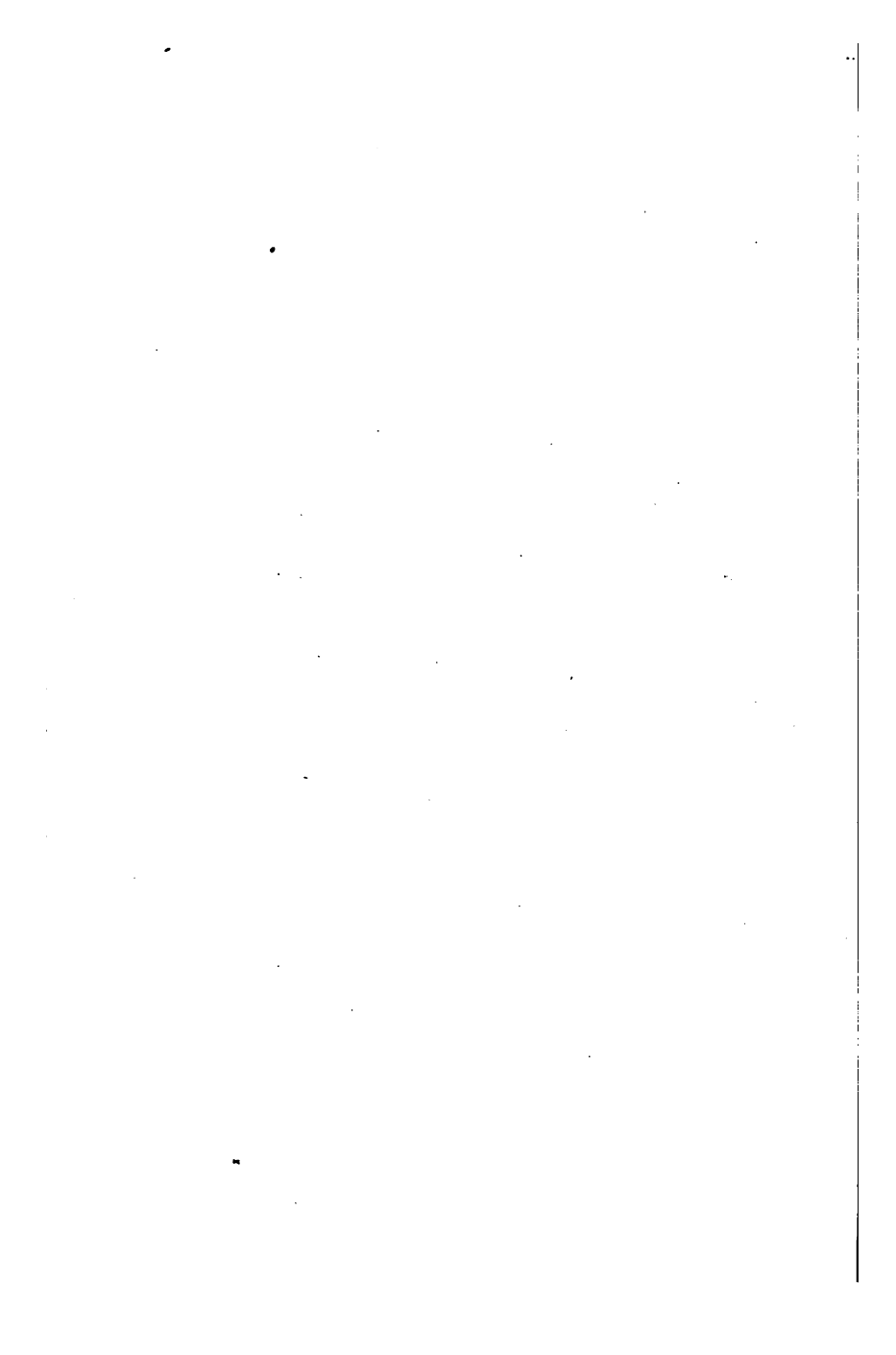
ICHABOD CHARLES WRIGHT, ESQ. M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF MAGDALENE COLLEGE, OXFORD,

THIS EDITION IS DEDICATED

IN TESTIMONY OF RESPECT FOR HIS EMINENT TALENTS AS A

TRANSLATOR OF DANTE AND HOMER.



P R E F A C E.

THE two former editions of this work were received with sufficient public approbation to make me anxious to revise it, and render it more worthy of the place permanently assigned it by various critics. Many years of severe toil have passed since I first thought of writing the lives of Italian poets. In my present state of mind, I should have doubted whether it was proper for me, as a clergyman, to enter upon a work so purely literary. My apology for still allowing it to occupy a portion of my time and thoughts, is derived from the subject itself. I love the men, immortal as they are, whose memoirs I have ventured to write. With all their weaknesses, inconsistencies, and errors, they constitute a class claiming, by turns, our highest admiration and our warmest sympathy. Italian poets exhibit the several phases of the literary character in its most striking aspects. It is in this respect that I write of them ;—

as a biographer, that is, and not as a critic or historian.

Considerable alterations have been made in the text of the work, which, as thus reprinted, may prove, it is hoped, in some respects, acceptable to the tourist, as well as to the student and general reader.

H. S.

London, July 25th, 1860.

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LIVES OF THE ITALIAN POETS.

DANTE.

THE family of Dante could boast of great antiquity. It was once believed that traces of its origin might be readily discovered in the reign of Julius Cæsar. A more modest supposition ascribed the beginning of its honours to the times of Charlemagne, when Eliseus, the founder of the race, removed from Rome and fixed his abode in Florence.

This Eliseus had numerous descendants. In the twelfth century, one of them assumed the name of Cacciaguida, and married into the noble family of the Aldighieri, or Alighieri of Ferrara. When the Emperor Conrad and Louis VII. led their splendid armament to the second crusade, Cacciaguida was one of the foremost of the seventy thousand gentlemen who made a willing offering of their lives and estates to support the enterprise. He fell in combat, leaving three sons to inherit his renown. Of these one took the name of his mother's family, and from him our poet was descended in the third degree.

Dante, or Durante Alighieri, was born at Florence in the month of May, 1265. Visions and prophecies had taught his parents to expect the birth of a prodigy. His mother dreamt that she beheld him as a youthful shepherd reposing by a fountain, and under the shade of a noble laurel. Suddenly, in attempting to reach the fruit of the topmost branches of the tree, he fell. Invisible for a time, he at length reappeared, but in the form of a majestic peacock. This dream admitted of a ready interpretation ; and to the maternal presentiments of Bella, were added the astrological predictions of the learned Brunetto Latini. Thus the light of Italy, given, says Boccaccio, to his age and country by the special grace of God, was welcomed at his birth by as many lofty hopes as tender caresses.

The father of the favoured infant died before any of these brilliant expectations could be realised. His mother, supported by fondness better than by prognostics, admirably fulfilled her parental duties. Provided with an ample fortune, she chose for his instructors the ablest and most celebrated men of Florence. Brunetto had done much towards the foundation of a native literature, and was one of Dante's earliest teachers.

It required but few years of diligent culture to show what might be expected of the future poet. The commencement of his life afforded many tokens of the virtues which dignified its maturity. Early subject to solemn impressions, the divine features of truth, and the solemn visions of religion, held dominion over his thoughts long before he gave them a form in verse. The Universities of Italy were now in such high repute that students flocked to them from all parts of Europe. Bologna and Padua numbered among their professors the most learned lawyers and philosophers of the age. It was as a stu-

dent in one of these academies that Dante, if we may believe a contemporary author*, laid the foundation of his extensive erudition. When at home, he cultivated the friendship of men who could best assist him in fostering his natural taste for the arts of music and painting. Under Casella and Giotto, the greatest masters of the age, he acquired sufficient skill in both these arts to make them tributary to his genius, and a frequent solace in trouble.

But the youth of Dante was under another spell, powerful as that of his passion for study. Florence exhibited every year, on the first of May, a scene of gaiety and festivity. Its citizens possessed ample means for these displays. Trades of various kinds, the arts, and commerce flourished among them; and the growing wealth of the manufacturer and the merchant marked that stage in the prosperity of the middle classes at which they became the proudest rivals of ancient aristocracy. The first effect of this rivalry in Florence was a love of display, in which painting, poetry, and music were made to contribute a new grace to all the enjoyments of society. May-day in the houses of the wealthy Florentines was celebrated with extraordinary splendour; and it was amid the fascinations of this festival in 1274, that Dante, then ten years old, first beheld, with the eyes of a lover, the never-to-be-forgotten Beatrice Portinari.† She was about the same age as himself; and her father enjoyed the reputation of being one of the richest and most honourable men in Florence. A mystery attends the record of this early passion. The

* Imola da Benvenuto. Muratori, *Antiq. Ital.*, t. i. p. 1070.

† Authors differ as to the real name: "*Bicem* appellabant, quam ipse pro *Bice* semper *Beatricem* significantius soleat appellare." JAN. MANETTI, *Vita Dantis*, p. 72. "*Beatrice*, cui morositate Florentinæ *Bice* dicebatur."—PHILIP VILLANI, *Vita*, p. 9.

love was mutual ; there was no great difference of rank, and it was not till many years later that Dante became involved in any of those political contentions which might have made him obnoxious to Folco Portinari. In his own romantic memoir of the beginning and growth of his love* for Beatrice, no clue is given to the cause which prevented their union. He describes the eagerness with which he looked for her smiles : the anxiety which lacerated his heart when she seemed for a time to neglect his appeals. But it is sufficiently evident, that he believed his affection was returned, and that, whatever their earthly fate, they could not be separated in spirit.

It has been stated that Beatrice became the wife of a Cavalier de' Bardi. This statement rests on the discovery of a document supposed to be the certificate of her marriage. Such evidence seems too slight to outweigh the greater probability, that the known delicacy of her constitution yielded to successive attacks of sickness. The last of these was aggravated by the grief which she suffered at the loss of her father. Her death quickly followed his. She had only reached the twenty-fifth year of her age ; and in the bitter lamentations which her lover uttered on the occasion, not a word appears which could lead to the supposition of her marriage. Her sickness, it is probable, alone delayed their union. Affliction and sorrow gave a softer and more elevated character to their affection ; and thus through long years of grief and exile, Dante could brood upon her memory

* Vita Nuova. Boccaccio, Origine, Vita, &c.—Aretino severely criticises Boccaccio's Life of Dante: "It seems to me," he says, "that our sweet and gentle Boccaccio wrote the life of this sublime poet as if he were writing a love story; and as if he thought a man was only born into this world to amuse himself with a ten days' courtship."—*Libro della Vita, Studi e Costumi di Dante*, p. 46. Venetia, 1560.

with delight, and find her spiritualised form present to him amid the grandest creations of his genius.

Had he been left to himself, at this crisis, the natural vigour of his mind and character would have provided him with sufficient resources against continued melancholy. He fell, of his own accord, more than half in love, once or twice, not long after the death of Beatrice. The incipient passion was checked by the tenderest recollections of his youthful love. But his ready admiration of beauty showed that he needed no compulsory interference, on the part of relatives or friends, to place him in the way of marriage. They had not the wisdom to understand this. No account was taken of his own efforts to disentangle himself from the net of unavailing grief. He had engaged boldly in the military enterprises of the republic. The battle of Campaldino, fought by the Florentines against the people of Arezzo, had proved him a brave and skilful soldier. His conduct was equally distinguished at the siege of Caperna. To fit himself also for the serious duties of the magistracy, he had become enrolled in one of the companies among which the free citizens of Florence were divided, and adoption into one or other of which was a necessary preliminary to civil rank. So well did he prove his capacity for business, that he was appointed at a very early stage of his career to take part in embassies of importance *; and his conduct in these transactions showed him to be a rising statesman rather than a melancholy dreamer.

But his affectionate friends could not be convinced that his mind and health were safe while he continued to write sonnets to a dead mistress, and speak of her as

* Filelfo MS. in Pelli, *Memorie per la Vita*, c. ix. p. 66; but some authors question his rapid advancement in state affairs.—*Sismondi*, t. iv. c. xxv. p. 182.

seen in visions. They were resolved to cure him of his supposed disorder. Boccaccio speaks with irreverent humour of the means which they employed. But, wisely or not, these good people believed, that, if they could succeed in persuading the poet to take a wife of their own careful choosing he would be saved, both for themselves and the world. Unbending as he usually was, he in this case sacrificed his deepest seated feelings to the persuasions of others. With thoughts and affections wholly pre-occupied by the departed Beatrice, he had already proved that as yet, at least, he could form no other ardent or permanent attachment. But a wife had been found for him; and, reluctant as he was, he led to the altar the high-born lady Gemma di Manetto, a daughter of the Donati, celebrated alike for their pride and the turbulence of their politics.

Whatever the other consequences of this marriage, it had the effect of settling Dante's social position, and bringing him into closer connexion with the chiefs of the parties then struggling for pre-eminence in the state.

Florence had now passed, during a period of eighty years, through a series of events which gave proof of the indomitable energy of her citizens, both for good and for evil.* Their career was not the simple straightforward course of men struggling for liberty alone. The Italian republics of this age were under the influence of various motives to bold and patient enterprise.* Freedom was one of the objects for which they were ready to risk or endure much. But it was only one among many. The people of all classes had learned to love gain, to aspire after riches, to covet the enjoyments which, it was

* Florence et ses Vicissitudes. M. Delécluze, t. i. p. 32.

evident, could now be procured by no other means than careful industry.* So remarkably had this feeling become prevalent in Florence, that the nobles, descendants of the haughtiest patrician families, sacrificed their ancient prejudices, and, to acquire wealth, became merchants, traders in every marketable commodity, and bankers. Thus the passion for pure republicanism was modified by tastes and interests of a very different character. Limited as was the area for action, political parties became far more numerous than the sanguinary factions which were alone known by name.

Had the war between Guelf and Ghibelline continued what it was at first, an honest conflict of opposite principles, there would have been no fighting in the dark, and whether the partisans of the Church or those of the empire had gained the victory, the only consequence would have been the supremacy for a season of one of the antagonist systems, when both would have yielded, and become subordinate to the general advance of civilisation.

The first in that train of events which gave such a dark colouring both to the life and character of many eminent Florentines occurred in the year 1215.† About the middle of the preceding century, the inhabitants of the city, then rising into importance, had resolved to be no longer subject to the insolence and extortions of the neighbouring nobles. Wealth gave the towns more power, and their opposition to the nobles became every day more determined. At length they were able to

* "These were the heroic ages of the history of Italy, and will for ever remain united with poetical tradition."—SISMONDI, *Hist. des Répub. Ital.*, t. iii. c. xix. p. 240.

† Villani, *Istorie Fiorentine*, vol. ii. c. xxxviii. p. 48; Leonardo Aretino, *Historia Fiorentina*, lib. ii. p. 38. Venetia.

dictate terms of peace; and it was agreed that their powerful neighbours should remain in undisturbed possession of their estates and ancient dignity, on condition that they pulled down their castles, and built themselves palaces in the city.

However this policy might avail for the time, it led to many disastrous consequences in the succeeding generation. Not only were the nobles brought into more frequent collision with the citizens, but, crowded close upon each other, every evil passion which belonged to the members of their own class had daily provocation. The Buondelmonti were among the earliest of the nobles who became residents in Florence. They were highly distinguished for chivalrous bearing and splendour of living. The heir to the wealth and honours of this important family was universally admired for his accomplishments, and for the elegance of his person. It happened that, after a long season of strife and wretchedness, all parties seemed to wish for repose. To secure this, nothing suggested itself to the minds of the peace-makers so likely to succeed as the union of contending families and factions by intermarriages. The younger branches of the nobility opposed no objection to this arrangement. Many had been the romantic vows, and perilous meetings, which promised nothing but sorrow, but which now resulted in most unexpected happiness. Thus Messer Forese Adimari was allowed to marry the daughter of the Count Novello; and the Donati and Uberti* met each other in magnificent nuptial feasts, remembering, fathers and brothers on each side, how, only a few weeks before, they had been watching to assassinate the now happy and welcomed bridegrooms. Florence resounded with rejoicings. The

* Aretino, *Historia Florentina*, lib. ii. p. 38.

humbler classes were not backward to adopt the same method of setting at defiance the evil spirit of faction ; and the hearts of Guelf and Ghibelline, for one short season, beat in harmony.

But an unlooked-for interruption to these festivities was at hand. Among the quarrels which threatened to produce the worst results was that of Buondelmonte with Oddo d'Arrigo, another nobleman of high birth, and jealous of family distinction. The friends of peace watched every opportunity of reconciling these haughty disputants. An occasion of more than ordinary promise was afforded by the frequent meetings at marriage feasts. Oddo d'Arrigo had a handsome niece. Young Buondelmonte was free from vows of any kind. Mutual friends proposed that he should marry this lady, deserving in every respect of his love and admiration. A brief courtship convinced him that they had not praised her too highly ; the day of their union was fixed ; and all Florence rang with tidings of the approaching event.*

On the evening of the day when the final pledge was given, the lover, occupied with thoughts of his coming happiness, mounted his horse to enjoy his musings in solitude. His way led him past the house of the Donati. He looked up, and saw the widowed Lady Donati earnestly beckoning to him from the balcony. Obeying her summons, he dismounted his horse, and on entering the house was smartly bantered with the suggestion, that he, the handsomest and most gallant nobleman in Florence, had sacrificed himself to a damsel of the most moderate pretensions. Then, with an air of vexation and despondence, she brought her youthful daughter from a neighbouring room, and presenting her to him, said,

* Villani, *Istorie Fior.*, vol. ii. c. xxxviii. p. 48; Aretino, *Hist. Fior.*, p. 38.; Machiavelli, *Ist. Fior.*, lib. ii. c. i.

"See, this is the prize which I had treasured for you, but which you must now reject." The Lady Donati had not miscalculated the power of her daughter's beauty. Hitherto kept in retirement, she was a stranger to Buondelmonte, and her dazzling charms inspired him with a passion as irresistible as it was sudden. On the instant he declared his love. The Lady Donati affected to deplore that it was, alas! too late. To his urgent entreaties, she agreed to see him again the following morning. He appeared at the appointed time; and protesting that he still felt himself free to obey the dictates of his own heart, she agreed to obtain the consent of her relations to his becoming the suitor of her daughter.

Nothing could have been more agreeable to the whole of the Donati family than this opportunity of humbling a rival house. The day, now close at hand, fixed for Buondelmonte's union with the niece of Oddo d'Arrigo, was insultingly chosen for that of his marriage with a beautiful daughter of the Donati. Notwithstanding the magnificence of the nuptial feast, a presentiment of evil saddened the hearts of many of the guests. Their forebodings were soon realised. It was not Oddo alone, or the other immediate relations of the forsaken lady, who felt the baseness of Buondelmonte's conduct. The rage which it first excited in them took speedy possession of the entire circle of their friends. A meeting was held to determine the best method of avenging the injured family. To some it appeared that an insulting personal chastisement would be the merited reward of his perfidy. Others deemed that no mere disgrace inflicted upon him would be sufficient punishment. They wished him at least to feel the points of their swords. But the prevailing sentiment of the assembly

had still to be expressed, when Mosca, a son of the Lamberti, declared that the perjured wretch must die.

Every caution was employed to secure the safe execution of the sentence thus pronounced. Spies were set upon Buondelmonte's movements. Easter Sunday approached ; and it was heard that on that day he would pay a visit to some friend on the other side of the river. The sacred festival was ushered in with accustomed pomp and gladness. All Florence seemed at peace, and the different classes of citizens greeted each other as they passed, as if feuds of every kind were buried in religious joy. Buondelmonte appeared at the door of his palace, clad, according to the sumptuous fashion of the day, in a white habit of the richest material. A white palfrey, beautifully caparisoned, awaited him ; and as he rode away, the people in the street, and his bride at her window, might well think that they had never beheld a nobler gentleman.

Just at that moment there had assembled in the house of the Amidei, on the other side of the Arno, a number of persons who were anxiously watching his approach. At the foot of the Ponte Vecchio, or Old Bridge, stood the Church of S. Stefano. Close by was a pillar, raised to support an ancient statue of Mars, regarded by many of the people of Florence with superstitious fear, as an omen of evil to their city. Buondelmonte was riding quietly past this spot, when suddenly he found himself surrounded by a body of armed assailants. Time was given him to feel the weight of their insulting reproaches. First one sword, and then another, pierced him. His snowy garments were soaked with his blood. At last he was torn from his horse, and despatched with a single blow.

No sooner had intelligence of this deed reached the

different quarters of the city, than the people, headed by the nobles, and divided into opposite parties, prepared themselves for deadly conflict. To many, the conduct of Buondelmonte appeared but as an ordinary offence, deserving indeed of punishment, but of punishment far short of death. To others, the whole affair was one of mere factious interest, and Guelf and Ghibelline were glad to cover the atrocity of their feuds with some colourable pretence. The houses of the nobles, flanked with lofty towers, were, at any time, speedily converted into fortresses. If those of the same party happened to be neighbours, a curious contrivance was employed to connect the roofs by a kind of flying bridge. From these erections missiles of all sorts were hurled down upon the assailants in the streets, and, in most cases, the fury of the multitude might be set at naught. When, about thirty years after the above events, the Guelf party was forcibly driven out, the conquerors immediately proceeded to lessen the height of the towers in which their enemies had entrenched themselves.* This was an improvement on the side of more peaceful habits. The institution of an officer called *Il Capitano di Popolo* offered a further security against the violence of the nobles. Hitherto the *Podestà*, or supreme magistrate, whatever his nominal power, had been able to effect little in times of general excitement. The next advance towards civic government was the division of the citizens into twelve arts, corresponding to our guilds, or companies. These arts were again divided into the greater and lesser, the former embracing the professions and more liberal branches of trade, the latter, callings of an inferior class. *Anziani*, or good men, as they were

* Gio. Villani, *Istorie Fiorentine*, vol. ii. c. xxxiii. p. 103.

denominated, superintended the affairs of these different bodies, who had also their several gonfalonieri, or military leaders, and standard-bearers, charged with the duty of summoning them to the field, whenever the public safety should require it. Somewhat less than twenty years after the birth of Dante, another material alteration took place in the government of the city. Six officers were elected from the greater arts, and as representing the different sections of the population. These officers received the title of Priors. They were invested with the highest honours of magistracy, were lodged, during their months of active service, in a palace, and enjoyed as much of the pomp as well as authority of sovereignty as could be suffered in a free and jealous republic.

This constitution had already passed through many trials, when Dante's social rank, and eminent abilities, pointed him out as a proper candidate for whatever honours it could confer. Little change had taken place in the temper or habits of the people since the death of Buondelmonte. The nobles, though supporting their own grandeur by commercial speculation, looked down with as much contempt as ever upon the other classes of citizens. Conflicts between Guelfs and Ghibellines had been repeated with more sanguinary fury as the result became more certainly the ruin of the defeated party. By the death of Frederic II. the Ghibellines lost their great support, and the Guelfs, who had been expelled the city in 1248, returned in triumph to their homes. Peace was established between the two parties*, and success attended the republic both in its own internal reforms and in its wars with neighbouring states. But

* Machiavelli, *Istorie Fioren.*, lib. ii. c. ii.

the Ghibellines found themselves reduced to insignificance. Enraged at this loss of power, they entered into a secret league with Manfred, king of Naples, son of the late emperor Frederic, and equally an enemy of the Roman See. A desperate conflict took place in Florence on the discovery of this treasonable correspondence, and ended with the expulsion of the Ghibellines from the city. At Sienna, the exiles were joined by a small body of troops sent them from Naples. Miscalculating their own strength or military capacity, the leading Guelfs at Florence determined on attacking the united force in its stronghold, and thus at once, as they hoped, crush their dangerous rivals. Florence immediately presented a scene of military display peculiar to itself. The huge standard of the city was borne slowly along upon a lofty car. A bell hung suspended beneath the floating pennon; and while its loud tolling announced to the citizens that the expedition was setting forth, it was at the same time a signal to the surrounding country, friendly or hostile, that the war had begun. Farinata degli Uberti awaited the approach of this formidable armament with no slight anxiety. The little band which he commanded could expect nothing but defeat, unless saved by some singular occurrence in their favour. This in reality took place. The Florentines were led into a snare; and Monte Aperto and the banks of the river Arbia became celebrated both in history and in verse for the slaughter which pursued the flying host.

Too hopeless to expect it, or too haughty to ask for mercy of their triumphant rivals, the principal Guelf families retired to Lucca. Among the exiles was Ser Brunetto; and Florence had soon to deplore a state of things which threatened it with the loss of all that was valuable to its rising civilisation. Such even was the

furious spirit of the Ghibellines, that when Manfred withdrew his troops, the chiefs of the party assembled at Empoli, and there proposed, as the readiest means of safety for themselves and their cause, to destroy Florence itself. The only man in the assembly who had sufficient patriotism and courage to oppose this atrocious proposal was the valiant Farinata degli Uberti. His generous ardour quelled the traitorous spirit of his associates, and Florence was saved.*

The death of Manfred, and accession of Charles of Anjou, produced another revolution in Florence. Assistance was readily afforded the Guelfs, both by the Pope and the new monarch. Thus aided, they triumphantly returned to their homes, after an exile of six years. The opposite faction did not await their arrival. Two days before their appearance at the gate of the city, the houses of the Ghibellines were shut up and deserted. Some further modifications of the magistracy followed the re-establishment of the Guelfs. These were rendered necessary by the reviving tyranny of the nobles, who, to whatever party they belonged, still waged an insulting and useless war of privilege with their fellow-citizens. This evil seemed even more inveterate than that of the political faction. The Ghibellines having quietly returned to Florence, the old strife gradually ceased amid the growing interests of social prosperity.† Both parties groaned under the disorders created by the pride of the nobles. To check their further progress, the people created a new office. A gonfalonier of justice was elected. By the advice of a wise and benevolent man, Giano della Bella ‡, himself a noble, this high officer was

* Villani; Machiavelli, Ist. Fioren., lib. ii. c. ii.

† Machiavelli, Ist. Fioren., lib. ii. c. iii.

‡ "Giano, più ardito che savio."—*Cronica di Dino Compagni*. *Rerum Ital.* Muratori, t. ix. p. 474.

put in command of four thousand men, and allowed to reside in the palace with the Priors. New laws were instituted to give efficacy to these arrangements. No nobleman was henceforth to have a place in the magistracy; and whatever the rank of a person, he was to be tried, if accused of crime, by the same rule as the humblest citizen. In a popular tumult which happened soon after this reform of the government, Corso Donati mortally wounded some man opposed to him in the fray. The citizens demanded that this distinguished nobleman should at once be punished as an example to his class. But there were circumstances in the case which apparently justified the authorities in refusing this demand. The rage of the people knew no bounds. Giano was accused as the author of all the disturbance, and the magistrates proposed his immediate apprehension. Every citizen in Florence, knowing the value of liberty and justice, was up in arms to defend him. But Giano resolved that no blood should be shed on his account. While the magistrates were deliberating on his case, he quietly left the city, and went into voluntary exile. The nobility seemed to breathe more freely as soon as they heard of his departure. An alteration of the laws against them was contemplated; and the people saw reason to fear that the loss of their champion would be fatal to the cause which he had so well supported. The most terrible conflict that Florence had ever witnessed within its walls was on the point of commencing. It was happily prevented by the entreaties and sage counsels of some few men, who, though of opposite parties, could agree to control their passions.

Another of those seasons of tranquillity, in which Florence advanced to such heights of wealth and magnificence, followed this truce of parties. It could number

more than 30,000 citizens, capable of bearing arms ; and another force of 70,000 men, dispersed in its neighbouring dependencies.* Such was the increase of all the arts of refinement, that men of stern minds would willingly have sacrificed them for the simplicity and morals of those earlier times, when, "sober and modest," the worthiest citizens walked abroad in leathern jerkins, and their wives were content with a close gown of scarlet cloth of Ypres, or camlet : when no father trembled at the birth of a daughter, thinking of the dowry which would be demanded of him ; and every home exhibited a scene of peace and love.†

It was at the time when Florence thus promised to become the first state in Italy, that Dante attained to the dignity of prior. He was now thirty-five years of age ; and, whatever the stories told, truly or idly, of his wife's temper, they were mutually happy in a family of five sons and a daughter. Dante, in fact, occupied the position of a wealthy and eminent citizen. No other eccentricity marked his character but that which naturally belonged to a man of singular sedateness, and vast range of thought. Had he not lived like the rest of the people of Florence, or had his practical good sense and virtues not been at this period even more apparent than his genius, he would never have been chosen to the highest place in the magistracy. It was not till a later period of his life that he displayed those peculiarities of genius and character which made men look at him with awe.

When the blood of Buondelmonte lay clotting under the sun, near the ancient statue of Mars, the Florentines of that time thought the old tradition of their forefathers

* Villani, Ist. Fior., lib. viii. c. xxxvii.; Machiavelli, lib. ii. c. iii.

† Paradiso, canto xv.; Villani, lib. vi. c. lxxi.

wellnigh fulfilled. Florence, it had been said, would be a theatre of strife and tumult. Scarcely, however, could it have been intended that the seeds of discord were never to be rooted from the soil. Still this seemed to be the case, when, in the midst of all the triumphs and enjoyments of a ripe civilisation, another mere family dispute could reawaken the horrors of civil war.

The intercourse between Pistoia and Florence had brought many of the richer families of these cities into close relationship. Thus the affairs of each had no less a domestic than political interest for the other; and when news arrived at Pistoia of some disaster in Florence, or in Florence of some calamity at Pistoia, both cities exhibited the same amount of distress.

Among the wealthiest houses in Pistoia, not one could be named which equalled that of the Cancellieri. This family had a humble origin; but it had spread into various branches, all rich and flourishing. Not less than a hundred gentlemen bearing arms boasted of the name; and each had his house and retinue proud of their several honours. Not only Pistoia, but all Tuscany*, confessed the power and influence of the Cancellieri. One thing only was wanting to their happiness. They failed in family concord and affection. The founder of the race was twice married, and had a numerous family by each wife. As the children grew up, they became jealous and quarrelsome; and while the one set proudly called themselves "the Bianchi," or "the White," after their mother's name, "Bianca," the other, in haughty defiance, assumed the title of "the Neri," or "the Black." As the new families increased in wealth, so their rivalries became more and more bitter. Magnificent estates and lordly

* Villani, b. viii. c. xxxvii.

mansions marked, on every side of Pistoia, how well the Cancellieri of the second generation had multiplied the riches of the first. But their neighbourhood was known not only by the princely splendour of their abodes, but by the deeds of violence perpetrated as either the relatives themselves, or their retainers, met each other in the way. Law was too weak to suppress the outrages of so powerful a family; and custom had not yet ceased to render such outbreaks of hatred and revenge too common to provoke public resentment.*

Had the quarrel, therefore, of the Cancellieri been confined to themselves, little effort would have been made, on the part of authority, to end it. But the Bianchi and the Neri at length drew to their sides large numbers of the citizens. The dispute now assumed a more dangerous character. Blood began to flow as adherents of the opposite factions met each other in the streets. The magistrates were set at nought; and Pistoia seemed given up to ruin. The people of Florence heard of these proceedings with dismay. Many of them had friends or relations in Pistoia; and it appeared but reasonable that the more powerful city should make some effort to save its weaker neighbour from so imminent a peril. In obedience to general opinion, the Florentine magistrates resolved to invite the principal men of the two parties to leave Pistoia for a time, and allow their respective grievances to be settled in Florence.† To this both the Bianchi and the Neri willingly assented.

On the arrival of the Cancellieri, they were severally greeted by the representatives of two great families, the

* Cronica di Dino Compagni; *Rerum Ital.* Muratori, t. ix. p. 480.

† This, says Aretino, was less likely to save Pistoia from the plague than to infect Florence.—*Hist. Fioren.*, lib. iv. p. 68.

heads of which hated each other as cordially as the Bianchi the Neri. These were the Donati and the Cerchi; Corso Donati being the chief of the one, and Vieri Cerchi of the other. The former was a man of fine and courteous temper; sufficiently rich, but far more distinguished for the shining qualities of an accomplished cavalier than for the extent of his possessions. The latter had vast wealth, acquired by successful speculation, but he was more prudent and subtle than generous.* For awhile the two parties watched each other gloomily at a distance; but the May festivals occurred soon after the arrival of the Pistoians. The usual merry-making took place in the streets and squares of the city. A ball in the Piazza di Santa Trinità brought together the choicest beauties and noblest gentlemen of Florence. As the latter pressed forward to the scene of entertainment, they became jostled against each other. Angry horsemen spurred their steeds into the midst of an insulted crowd; others rode up to the defence of the crowd; Cerchi and Donati found themselves on the opposite sides. Their swords were the first drawn. At an early period of the fray, the nose of Ricoverino, one of the Cerchi, was cut sheer off; and the battle became general.

There was no peace for Florence after this. The Cerchi were the more powerful, both in numbers and wealth. They felt their superiority. The funeral of a lady beloved and lamented, brought the factions again into open conflict. An attack on the house of Corso Donati was proposed. To protect himself, he assembled his friends and followers, for counsel, in the Church of Santa Trinità. There it was determined to appeal to

* Villani describes the family as "uomini morbidi, salvatichi, e 'ngrati," lib. viii. c. xxxvii.

the Pope, and demand the assistance of some foreign prince.

Whatever the evils suffered by Florence itself, or any party of its citizens, this call for foreign intervention was treason to the safety of the republic. A report of the meeting, intended to be secret, in Santa Trinità, reached the ears of Dante and his colleagues. They saw the necessity of immediate and decisive measures. If any difference of opinion prevailed, it was overpowered by the firmness of Dante. To him had been assigned the first place in the public councils; and when he advised that the chiefs of both parties should be banished from the city, his sentence was unanimously adopted. Florence beheld the greatest of her citizens pass into exile; the Neri being sent to a fortress in Perugia, the Bianchi to Serrazzana. Dante solemnly declared himself of no party, but he was strongly suspected of favouring the Bianchi. This suspicion seemed confirmed by the early return of some of the Ghibellines from exile. His defence rested upon a fact honourable to his humanity. The returned exiles had been seized with a sickness which threatened a fatal termination. Among the sufferers was the celebrated poet Guido Cavalcanti. He died soon after reaching home. But Corso Donati had already appealed to the Pope, and reports were prevalent in Florence that Charles of Valois was on his road to Tuscany, armed with authority to reinstate the exiles. It was a period of great alarm and difficulty. The influence of Corso at the court of Rome must be counteracted. Who could undertake so difficult an embassy? It was while the Priors, and other men in authority, were discussing this question, that Dante is said to have most signally displayed the natural haughtiness of his disposition. Seeing the doubts which prevailed, he suddenly

exclaimed, "Who will go unless I go, and if I go, who will remain to govern?"

The latter difficulty appeared less insurmountable than the former. Dante received authority to make the best terms he could with the Roman court. But scarcely had he reached the scene of his embassy, when Charles of Valois entered Florence at the head of a numerous force, and compelled the inhabitants to conceal both their fears and their hostility under the mask of the most servile flattery. Charles, as the Pope's ally and agent, professed a desire to see all parties united in brotherly concord. The exiles were immediately recalled; and Corso Donati entered the gates in triumph. Close on his steps followed a rabble, intent upon riot and plunder; and for five days Florence was a prey to outrage.* Incendiary fires blazed in every quarter of the city; and murder, by day and by night, spread horror among all classes of the inhabitants.

Such was the alarm created by this state of things, that the various ruling factions found themselves forced into a temporary truce. Order was restored by their united influence, and Florence enjoyed a brief season of tranquillity. But the reconciliation of parties had no real foundation. Charles of Valois employed his whole authority on the side of the Neri, and a decree was passed, condemning the principal men of the opposite side to a considerable fine and two years' exile. If the fine should not be paid, the property of the exile was to be confiscated; and, shortly after, another decree was published, warning the banished, that burning alive would be the punishment inflicted on any exile apprehended in the territory of Florence after this proclamation. Men

* Muratori, *Annali d' Italia*, vol. xi. p. 648. An. 1301.

of later times have shuddered on reading such a sentence, levelled against the life of the greatest genius of his age and country. But so little was public resentment excited by the proceeding, that no contemporary author mentions the threat of burning alive ; and it was probably regarded as but a fair measure of punishment for any man, however great, who should contumaciously violate a decree of the republic.*

Dante heard of the proceedings against him while he was still at Rome. It soon became obvious that any further efforts of his would be vain. With no desire to conceal his suspicion of the pontiff's disingenuous policy, he took a hasty leave of him and his cardinals, and prepared for his journey towards Florence. But he had no sooner left the gates of Rome, than the dangers of his position became more and more apparent. Wherever he stopped for rest, suspicious reports made him hesitate as to his future course. He saw himself surrounded by snares, and no friend was at hand to whom he could look for either counsel or sympathy. His love for Florence; his natural energy and patriotism ; the thought of his home, of his children, urged him to hasten his steps, and present himself, at all hazards, before his accusers. But as he pursued his way, the tidings which met him proved plainly that neither reason nor justice governed the triumphant faction. He had been sentenced to exile ; his possessions were confiscated ; and he was henceforth to be numbered among the worst enemies of his country. Lest any fond notion should enter his mind, that this

* Tiraboschi says, that he received an account of this remarkable fact from the learned Bolognese senator, Lodovico Savioli, who discovered the decree in the Archives of Florence; and made an authentic copy of it in the year 1772.—*Storia della Letter. Ital.*, vol. v. lib. iii. p. 481.

sentence was but a sudden and passionate threat, it was confirmed by a long series of subsequent proceedings. There was consequently now but one alternative for Dante: to return to Florence, and perish at the stake; or to be a wanderer for the rest of his life, and die an exile.

An injustice so terrible, vindictiveness so regardless of all the usual limits of political enmity, would have filled the dullest soul with indignation. But Dante's passionate nature rendered him susceptible to the extremes of grief and resentment. He saw with a prophetic eye the sorrows which awaited him; and the thoughts which then gathered together in his heart, were, in some future day, to come forth like a host of fiery spirits, making Florence tremble at his name.

There was ample time for him to brood over his injuries in his five days' journey from Rome to Tuscany. As he toiled from summit to summit of the dreary Apennines, the habits of his mind must often have disposed him to trace, in the surrounding solitudes, a resemblance to his own condition. When he traversed the same route a few weeks before, it was with all the comforts and show of a man of wealth, and as the chosen representative of the Florentine magistracy. He was now returning with the bitter feeling that if he found bread to eat, or a roof to shelter him, he must owe it to the bounty of a stranger. As he began to descend the mountains, and the valleys and olive groves, so dear to his sight, appeared in view, the associations of home, never again to be his, only served to quicken his resentment. It was while he still hesitated as to his future course, that messengers met him, bringing tidings that a powerful body of exiles had taken refuge in Arezzo, and eagerly desired his advice and co-operation. Hastening his journey to that city, his presence was

hailed with delight. He became a member of the council formed to prepare measures for an attack on Florence. His fame for genius was already sufficiently great to make him an object of veneration. Among those who sought his society, more for the charms of his conversation than for his eminence as a political leader, was the amiable and accomplished Bosone da Gubbio. This excellent man was the representative of the noble family of the Rafaelli; and though then but little more than twenty years of age, was already an exile among the other Ghibellines of his province. His love of literature was rather increased than lessened by the troubles incident to his rank and opinions. During a long and active life, he occupied stations of considerable importance; and in all the successes which attended him, his personal merit secured him the esteem of his most distinguished contemporaries. Not many years had passed before he became podestà of Arezzo, now the scene of his exile; and he had the satisfaction of affording an asylum to Dante when the sorrows of exile were beginning to press most heavily upon him.

The Bianchi had numerous partisans in Bologna, Pisa, and Perugia. It was the known desire of the new pope, Benedict XI., a pious and enlightened man, to see Florence tranquillised.* To accomplish this object, he had summoned to his presence twelve of the leading men

* It was while the Cardinal da Prato, at the instance of Benedict XI., neither Guelf nor Ghibelline, was endeavouring to settle affairs at Florence, that the famous spectacle took place on the river Arno, from which Dante is supposed to have taken his idea of the *Inferno*. It was a strange way of showing honour to the papal legate, or of amusing the people. Hell, with its deep pits and blazing fires, formed the centre of the drama. Crowds thronged the bridge near the arches of which it was represented. While intent upon the horrible spectacle, the bridge gave way, and a vast multitude perished by drowning or burning.—MURATORI, *Annali d' Italia*. An. 1304.

among the Neri; and many of the Florentines of both parties cordially wished for the success of his interference. But the Cardinal da Prato, who had lately acted as his legate at Florence, entertained no hope that such pacific measures would quiet the turbulent spirits, among whom he had himself encountered only disappointment and insult. A few words from him brought the counsels of the exiles to a speedy termination. It was resolved to attack Florence by a sufficient force to free it, at once, from the hands of the faction which oppressed it. The absence of the men who could best have resisted such an attack was the cardinal's main argument for this precipitate measure.

It was on the night of the 21st of July that the portion of the force furnished by Arezzo began its march towards Florence. The entire body was to consist of sixteen hundred cavaliers, and nine thousand foot soldiers. Secrecy was essential to success; and the party from Arezzo continued to march unobserved, through the night, till it arrived at Lastra, only about two miles from the still unalarmed and unsuspecting city. Instead, however, of pressing forward, the leader commanded a halt, and the hours spent in repose defeated the objects of the expedition.

Tidings of the approaching force were speedily conveyed to Florence. Universal alarm prevailed. All parties trembled at the appearance of men who, calling themselves citizens, seemed resolved on passing the gates as conquerors. Among those who took the most vigorous part in preparing for resistance, were many who, only a short time before, had lamented the banishment of the Neri as an act of cruelty and injustice. A wise jealousy produced this change of feeling. The exiled citizen,

returning with ten thousand armed companions, might be more dangerous than grateful as a neighbour.

No effectual opposition could have been made to the powerful body of cavaliers, and well-appointed infantry, collected for the expedition, had they been led by competent officers. By the delay at Lastra, they had lost the advantage which would have attended a sudden assault on Florence. They now committed the greater error of advancing with only a portion of the army. The undefended gate of San Gallo admitted them within the walls; but they took up their position on a spot exposed to the full rays of the sun, and where no water could be obtained either for the men or the horses.* Fainting with thirst and exhaustion, they were ill able to sustain the resolute onset of the city militia. A few hours saw them driven far beyond the walls of Florence; the roads were covered with the dead or wounded; gardens and vineyards concealed many of the unhappy fugitives who clung to the idea of home; and not a week had passed before the whole of the little army was divided again into its ill-connected fragments, and ceased to exist.

No record remains to show what part Dante took in these proceedings. It is impossible to suppose that he was not deeply concerned in whatever measures were adopted by his fellow-exiles. But it is far from necessary to conclude that he approved of all their plans; or that he was always an agent in their execution. We know that, on a subsequent occasion, when Florence was about to be threatened by an armed force, he refused to approach its walls; and it is not improbable that, though he acknowledged the necessity of seeking the support of powerful allies against an obdurate faction,

* Cronica di Dino Compagni; *Rerum Ital.* Muratori, p. 515.

he might shrink from taking any part in proceedings which bore the character of a civil war.

Whatever his share in the expedition from Arezzo, its unfortunate and discreditable termination rendered his circumstances more than ever hopeless. His enemies at Florence urged their charges against him with apparently greater justice as well as increased virulence. He was, at least, one of a party which had taken arms against the republic, and which, had it not been successfully repulsed, would, for the purpose of private revenge, have made the city a prey to fire and sword. Strange indeed it was, that such obloquy should have been heaped upon the head of a man, whose only political offence consisted in his dread of foreign interference. Had that warning been taken which his prudence suggested, Florence would have escaped a long period of oppression and misery, as well as the disgrace of having banished the noblest of her citizens. Charles of Valois and his followers left none of the evils unperpetrated which Dante had foretold.

There is a solemnity in the doubts which obscure the traces of his after-life.* The difficulty of determining the place of his sojourn till his days were almost ended, goes far to prove that, for just twenty years, he was without a home. Verona and Ravenna are the two cities in which he appears to have resided during the longest intervals of his wanderings. It was to the for-

* A tradition exists that he visited Oxford. The truth of this depends upon the authority of Giovanni da Serravalle, bishop of Fermo, who meeting at the council of Constance two English bishops, Bubwith of Bath and Halam of Salisbury, was persuaded by them and Cardinal Saluzzo to make a translation of the *Commedia* into Latin prose. The version was made, but never printed. A copy is said to exist in the library of the Vatican.—TIRABOSCHI, *Storia*, t. v. p. 496, note.

mer that he bent his steps soon after leaving Arezzo. How long he remained there on this occasion is uncertain. In the interval between his first and second residence at Verona, he spent some time at Padua. Thence he is said to have proceeded to Lunigiana, where he was hospitably received by the Marquis Marvello Malaspina. Bologna is also named among the cities which he visited during these early years of his exile; and though no record exists of either his sorrows or employments at this period, his continued wanderings from place to place indicate a state of mind full of perplexity and care.*

The necessities of his family were daily increasing. No certain provision existed for his wife, and their five children, except the small income derived from the dowry of the former. Verona seems to have offered the best prospects of a home; and there Dante, about the year 1308, became settled in a house of his own, and is said to have obtained not only the ordinary rights of citizenship, but to have been elected to an office in the magistracy.†

For the temporary repose thus enjoyed, he was indebted to the Scaligeri, princes or lords of Verona. Alboino della Scala was among the earliest admirers of his genius. In the delight with which he welcomed him, he was cordially joined by his younger brother and associate, who succeeded to the sole rule as Il Can Grande. Under him Verona attained to the highest degree of wealth and magnificence. His court became celebrated alike for splendour and hospitality. Eminence for ability, and greatness of misfortune, gave an

* Boccaccio, *Vita*, p. 27; Aretino, p. 48; Philippi Villani, *Lib. de Civit. Floren. famosis Civibus*, p. 48. Floren., 1847.

† Maffei, *Verona Illustrata*, vol. iii. lib. ii. p. 113.

equal claim to the friendly greeting of the Can Grande. At the repasts, where the sumptuous abundance and rude merriment of the age were not unfrequently carried to excess, wit and talents of every kind were called into display. Dante had already been long a familiar guest on these occasions, when his sensitive pride received an offence which destroyed his comfort at Verona. A feast was given with usual success. Wine and song had raised the spirits of the company to a high pitch of excitement, which one of the guests, a jester by profession, contrived to support by a rapid succession of drolery and witticisms. The Can Grande himself shared in the merriment. At the height of his mirth he turned to Dante, who sat absorbed in silent thought, and asked him, by what means it was that a mere fool had proved to them so much better a companion than a man of genius? "By similarity of intellect and manners," said Dante, coldly.

We know too little of the circumstances connected with this anecdote to judge of their effect upon Dante's position at the court of Verona. It is certain, however, that some estrangement took place between him and the prince about this time, and Dante was not of a temperament to accept hospitality where he suspected a decline of friendship. The gloom which habitually hung upon his spirits rendered him ill adapted for the society of courtiers. He was only happy on his own solitary path of meditation. Ordinary men looked on him with amaze. Hence the story related by Boccaccio. Some ladies were chatting and laughing at the door of a house in Verona, when they were awed into silence by the approach of a person whose countenance struck them as strange and unearthly. One of them recognised him as the poet Dante, and said, half frightened, in a whisper,

"That is the man who descends into the place of torment, and can tell you what is going on there, down below." "I believe you, dear sister," answered one of the other ladies, "for you see how embrowned his cheeks are with the smoke, and how his dark beard has been curled and crisped by the heat." Though uttered in a whisper, Dante heard the remark, and looking back, he bowed to the ladies with a smile which showed that he fully entered into the humour of their dialogue.*

When he again set forth on his wanderings, Dante left his family still settled at Verona.† There his children grew up, and became distinguished for respectability and talent. Two of his sons acquired some reputation, both as authors and lawyers, and their descendants were known in Verona to the second or third generation. Only the most vague accounts remain of Dante's course after leaving that city. By some writers, he is said to have visited Paris, and to have distinguished himself in the university there by discussions on the most abstruse points of science and theology.

But, amid all his wanderings, he had never ceased to love Florence, or to cherish the hope that he might one day be again happily ranked among its citizens. The report that Count Henry of Luxembourg would probably be elected to fill the vacant imperial throne gave a sudden impulse to this hope. Dante entertained profound respect for his noble and chivalrous character; and he lost no time in calling upon all, who might influence the election, to secure the crown for a man whose virtues promised so

* Boccaccio; Manetti, *Vita Dantis*, p. 79.

† We hear no more of Dante's wife. The above-cited author says, that she was so morose and quarrelsome, that her temper at length became intolerable; and that Dante and she separated, according to the expression used, by mutual consent, "*quasi divortio inter se facto*."—MANETTI, *Vita Dantis*.

much benefit to the world. Great was his joy when the tidings reached him that Henry of Luxembourg had actually been proclaimed Emperor of Germany. Having been admitted to a personal interview with the new sovereign, he afterwards addressed him in an epistle abounding in expressions of loyalty and devotion, but the great aim of which was to induce him to take arms against the factious government of Florence. There are passages in this letter strikingly at variance with the affectionate pleading tone in which he had some time before written to his fellow-citizens. He now addressed them in the language of scorn, as well as reproach, every sentence imbued with the bitterness peculiar to his expressions of disdain.

The Emperor could not neglect the interests of a party, to the zeal of which he had been so largely indebted. But, with all his good qualities, he was, in many respects, weak and vacillating. Having led his army towards Florence, at the latter end of September, 1312, he halted a few miles from the city, and began to ravage the surrounding country with fire and sword. The flames of burning villages could be seen in the distance day and night. Terrified multitudes collected in the roads, and then separated into bands, each hastening to implore shelter and succour of some of the neighbouring towns. The appeal was quickly answered. Small bodies of troops were despatched towards the expected scene of conflict. Florence itself put forth all its energy; even the bishop mounted on horseback, and proceeded, at the head of the clergy, to defend the gate of S. Ambrogio. Everything was in readiness to sustain the momentarily looked for attack of the Emperor. But he approached no nearer the city; and in the month of October, to the equal surprise and joy of the Florentines, he suddenly

retired with his army, and took the road to Buonconvento. There he ended his brief career, dying of poison, administered by the treacherous hand of a monk who was giving him the sacrament.

The last spark of hope in Dante's mind was extinguished by the death of Henry. Though he had refused to appear in his camp, it was by his counsels a foreign army had been brought almost to the very gates of the city. He had of late written and spoken in the insulting tone of anticipated triumph. His work "*De Monarchia*," dedicated to the Emperor, could not fail to unite against him every section of the powerful party which held in reverence the claims of the Church. Admired now for the freedom and dignity of its sentiments, it then awed or dazzled, rather than enlightened the minds which it was intended to instruct. Thus hatred, prejudice, and alarm were readily excited by the name of Dante. His enemies pointed at him as equally the enemy of the Church and of his country. No ordinary political associates would be willing to share the risk of supporting his apparently extreme opinions. He was, therefore, left to seek a refuge among the few noble-minded men who were either, like himself, advanced in intelligence beyond the age in which they lived, or felt a veneration for virtue and genius, which rendered them superior to the lower claims of party.*

* Exertions were made, at different times, to restore Dante to his country. In answer to the repeated instances of his friends, the government at length offered to cancel the decree against him on the following terms: namely, that he should pay a certain sum of money; and openly in church avow his guilt, and ask pardon of the republic. A writer in the "*Edinburgh Review*," September 1818, has given the original of a manuscript letter written by Dante in answer to these proposals. The manuscript is preserved in the Laurentine Library

Bosone da Gubbio, and Guido da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, regarded him with the affection of personal friendship. They were themselves men of ability, accomplished in the learning of their times, and inspired by the most generous sentiments. With the former he had been in correspondence since their early meeting at Arezzo. Bossone, restored to his patrimonial domain, now rejoiced to receive him in his castle of Colmollaro, a

at Florence. We subjoin the reviewer's version of this most interesting document.

"From your letter, which I received with due respect and affection, I observe how much you have at heart my restoration to my country. I am bound to you the more gratefully, that an exile rarely finds a friend. But after mature consideration, I must, by my answer, disappoint the wishes of some little minds; and I confide in the judgment to which your impartiality and prudence will lead you. Your nephew and mine has written to me, what indeed had been mentioned by many other friends, that, by a decree concerning the exiles, I am allowed to return to Florence, provided I pay a certain sum of money, and submit to the humiliation of asking and receiving absolution. Wherein, my father, I see two propositions that are ridiculous and impertinent. I speak of the impertinence of those who mention such conditions to me; for in your letter, dictated by judgment and discretion, there is no such thing. Is such an invitation to return to his country glorious for Dante, after suffering in exile almost fifteen years? Is it thus, then, they would recompense innocence which all the world knows, and the labour and fatigue of unremitting study? Far from the man who is familiar with philosophy, be the senseless baseness of a heart of earth, that could do like a little sciolist, and imitate the infamy of some others, by offering himself up as it were in chains. Far from the man who cries aloud for justice, this compromise, by his money, with his persecutors. No, my father, this is not the way that shall lead me back to my country. But I shall return with hasty steps, if you, or any other, can open to me a way that shall not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante; but if by no such way Florence can be entered, then Florence I shall never enter. What! shall I not everywhere enjoy the sight of the sun and stars? and may I not seek and contemplate, in every corner of the earth under the canopy of heaven, consoling and delightful truth, without first rendering myself inglorious, nay, infamous, to the people and republic of Florence? Bread, I hope, will not fail me."—*Edinburgh Review*, vol. xxx. p. 349.

tranquil and romantic abode, consecrated to literature, domestic comfort, and baronial hospitality. A charming picture is given in one of Dante's sonnets of the manner in which Bosone divided his time between rural pleasures and the education of his sons. To the enjoyments of such a man in such a retirement, the society of Dante must have been a great accession. Their old experience of the conflicts and storms of political life; their acquaintance with most of the remarkable characters of the age; the philosophy which both had learnt from many afflictions, would have made them acceptable companions to each other under almost any circumstances. But they were now engaged in applying their knowledge to the solution of problems which such men will never fail to study when left to repose and solitude.

The last tie being broken by which hope had bound him to the world, Dante now tranquilly resolved to devote the remainder of his life to study and meditation. Some portion of his great work was still unwritten. Even that which had been composed at an earlier period might offer much for reconsideration. The last ten years had brought him acquainted with many new characters; had made him sadder and wiser; and the conflict between worldly ambition and the sublimer tendencies of his soul being well nigh decided on the part of the latter, most of the objects of thought would appear in a somewhat altered light. An old tradition states, that he had written six or seven cantos of the "Inferno" before his banishment. This commencement of the poem he had given up for lost; but while search was being made, after the pillage of the house, for papers connected with his wife's property, the manuscript was discovered, and eventually fell into the hands of his friend Dino Compagni. By him it was sent to Dante, who rejoiced at its recovery,

and regarded the circumstance as an encouraging intimation of divine Providence that he should continue his design.* If it be true that the poem was thus begun while he was in the full vigour of life, and engaged in its most exciting employments, it is a deeply interesting fact, that to complete it, he was now anxious to abstract his thoughts wholly from the world, and bury himself in the profoundest solitude. For this purpose he left the castle of his hospitable friend, and besought a cell of the monks of Camaldoli in their monastery di Fonte Avellana.† There he continued his wonderful meditations, and found his mind sufficiently elevated above the storms of earthly passions to breathe the air and taste the serene delights of Paradise. Abundant internal evidence exists to show, that when Dante was employed in the latter part of his work, he must have enjoyed a tranquillity, neither common to his passionate nature, nor to be looked for in any man exposed to the early agitations of a life like his.

We are not told how long he continued in this peaceful retreat. But when he left it, it was to take up his abode with one of the most enlightened princes of Italy, Guido Novello da Polenta, lord of Ravenna. Historical associations of surpassing splendour; the finest monuments of religious art; the pine forest which no stranger ever speaks of without emotion, have rendered Ravenna, from the days of Dante to our own, dear to every man of genius who has made it his temporary sojourn. Guido himself had drunk deep of the cup of affliction. Nothing could obliterate from his memory the image of his beloved daughter Francesca. Far better would it have been for him to sacrifice his principality to the lords of Rimini,

* Philip Villani, *Lib. de Civit. Florent. Famosis Civibus*, p. 10.

† "Luogo orrido e solitario."—*Filelfo MS. in Pelli*, c. xiv. p. 93.

than to purchase peace by devoting his beautiful child to a detested lover. In all his courtly festivities, her bleeding form was present to the thoughts of his guests as well as to his own. To render the grief far more bitter than any natural sorrow, her fate was that of a fallen and guilty soul; the meed of a sin blending her once sweet name with infamy.

Between men like Dante and Guido, bold, severe, and accustomed to the freest utterance of thought, there could be no restraint in conversation, whatever the theme most interesting to their minds. It matters little whether the famous passage in the fifth book of the "Inferno" formed originally a part of that canto, or was subsequently introduced. In either case, it must seem strange to ordinary apprehension, that the father of Francesca could venerate and love the man, who had pictured her as an inhabitant of those

"doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell;—hope never come,
That comes to all."

An explanation must be sought partly in the terrible conviction of Guido's own afflicted heart, that it could be no otherwise; and partly, in the wonderful knowledge and tenderness with which Dante treated the subject, so mournfully interesting to the people of Ravenna. Preachers had made it the theme of discourses, more or less open in their language; confessors, according to their temper, had soothed, or increased the anguish of the unhappy father. But Guido could better trust the powerful and truthful spirit of Dante. With him he had neither to suspect flattery, nor dread denunciation. They could calmly explore together the dark regions of that world, which has ever become nearer in thought

to those who suffer most anguish in this. Guido had one grief, not to be alleviated by any of the common sources of consolation. Dante had experienced many troubles, but they were now concentrated, in his declining years, into the one bitter reflection, that he had nothing to hope for on this side the grave. To his long acquaintance with distress may be attributed not merely isolated passages of his poem, but its very foundation, its all pervading and vivifying idea. He needed another world for his far-stretching affections ; for the love, and no less, unhappily, for the enmities of his strong nature. The creed and temper of the times were favourable to the faith which answered to his yearning heart. When he spoke of Hell, of Purgatory, and Paradise, his words were like those of a traveller, who had once visited, and was still again to traverse the realms which he had described. Men felt an indescribable awe in listening to such a poet. The anecdote of the ladies of Verona affords a fair indication of the popular notion entertained of his character. Guido shared in this sentiment ; and no guest could have been more welcome to him than Dante. If the fifth canto of the " *Inferno* " already contained the story of Francesca, he could not fail to venerate the man who, sternly just to morality and holiness, had tempered the supposed punishment of guilt with such a tender softening of its horror. But if we may conjecture that the episode of Francesca was written after Dante's closer intimacy with Guido, there is still greater reason to admire the moral grandeur of his genius. He would not question the decrees of divine justice for the friendship of any potentate on earth ; he would never suffer imagination to tamper with that common sense of right and purity, to which all the happiness of social life must ultimately be referred. When Guido, there-

fore, spoke to him of Francesca, he had none of the ready flatteries of a court-preacher, or confessor, with which to soothe him. He spoke as he had written, or was about to write; and, if consolation could be had in such a case, it was to be derived from his melancholy truthfulness. The worst and the darkest was shown, but there were gleams of light about it. Despair, unmixed gloom, came nearer the convictions of Guido's mind than any shows of hope. Dante's knowledge of human nature prevented him from making any vain attempt to dislodge these convictions; but how much less terrible they became, when Francesca seemed to speak more in sorrow than in agony.

One event only occurred to disturb the repose and consolations which Dante enjoyed at Ravenna. Guido had provoked the hostility of Venice. An embassy was necessary, and he could find no one so well qualified for the mission as Dante. Unwilling as the poet was to become involved again in political affairs, he had too much friendship for Guido to refuse his request. But the haughty Venetian merchants cared little for the genius of the wonderful man who appeared before them. Neither his language nor his arguments were well understood. He succeeded in none of the objects of his embassy. Full of disgust, he returned to Ravenna, with a spirit more broken down by this disappointment than by any of the accumulated distresses of his former life. Guido received him with open arms, and used every argument which friendship could suggest to lessen his vexation. But with the loss of that fortitude, which had hitherto sustained him, his bodily health rapidly declined. He became aware of his approaching end, and prepared himself for it with the fervent and yet lowly piety, which, in the stormiest seasons of his life, and in the grandest efforts

of his genius, bore witness to his faith. It is said that, shortly before he expired, he found comfort in assuming the habit of one of the lower classes of Franciscans. Men had looked upon him as haughty and ambitious. He wished to leave the world in the humblest guise of poverty and repentance. His death occurred on the 14th of September, 1321. Guido lamented it with the sorrow of a friend. The people of Ravenna eagerly swelled the pomp with which he followed him to the grave. Italy at large felt that its greatest man was departed. Florence soon after contended for the remains of the illustrious exile; but the monument which Guido raised to his memory was jealously guarded by the citizens of Ravenna, and continued undisturbed, till Cardinal Bembo, two hundred years after, replaced it by one of a loftier design.

The main features of Dante's character are traced, with sufficient distinctness, by the events of his life. His genius, the vast and peculiar endowments of his mind, can only be adequately known by a careful reading of his works. There is a caution which ought to be given to all who approach the study of this great author: traditional criticism, the criticism repeated from generation to generation, has done less to explain the difficulties of his language than to interfere with, and injure, the vital force of his thoughts. The reader of Dante must have trust in himself. He must have both his heart and his understanding free from prescribed notions. Dante is so truthful in his delineations, that, whether it be some object of art, some great work of nature, or the shapes and motions of beings in unseen worlds, he is equally faithful, in the one case, to known realities, and, in the other, to the laws which still keep within the limits of truth the boldest excursions of creative genius. A

powerful mind can only be followed on its proper course by minds of corresponding character. But truthfulness is a central light in the profoundest depths of genius. Where all would be mystery, and incomprehensible to the greater part of mankind, this truthfulness, as the property of some of the grandest of imaginative minds, opens to every healthful intellect the richest treasures of thought. It is thus with Dante. He is not for one nation, or for one generation, more than for another. He is no exclusive classic even for one order of intellects. To the men of all times, ages, and moods of thought, he exhibits forms of existence, of suffering and enjoyment, of remorse and triumphant virtue, so enduring, that they are little affected by the measures or circumstances of time, and still less by anything unessential to the health and seriousness of the mind by which they are surveyed.

When honesty of purpose to describe things as they exist, is combined with a strength of vision which passes the boundaries of all ordinary knowledge, the result is an opening of new worlds to our sympathies and hopes; the awakening of feelings, which pay homage to poetry, but still more to the truth which is its inspiration and its substance.

Dante's course of life helped to mature the truthfulness of his mental character. It was severe and honest in its very constitution; but its best principles gained fresh strength from the stern discipline to which they were subject during a probation of just thirty years. Dante was eminently a scholar and a politician as well as a poet. He knew all that was known in his age; and in his treatise "*De Monarchia*" he expounded truths which the politicians of many generations to come may read with increasing interest. But practical experience, political wisdom, philosophical speculation, had as much

to do with his poetry as with the objects to which they more immediately referred. Not a thought passed through his mind, but it bore with it a train of associated realities. In every act and passage of his great drama, he spoke with the power which knowledge gives, still looking for, and drawing light from heaven.

PETRARCH.

PETRARCH, like Dante, was the descendant of one of the most ancient families in Florence. His father, Pietro Petracco, or Petraccolo, was a respectable notary. But party politics diverted him from the sober paths of his profession. He engaged ardently in the opposition of the Ghibellines to Charles of Valois ; and his name was included with that of Dante in the proscription which followed their unsuccessful project. Accompanied by other exiles, he found shelter, with his lately married wife, Eletta Canigiani, in Arezzo. When the descent was made upon Florence on the twentieth of July, 1304, he bore arms in the little band of citizens which marched to attempt the recovery of their homes. On that very night of sorrow and discomfiture Eletta gave birth to Francesco.

The sentence passed on Petracco did not extend to his wife, and she was permitted to take up her abode on a small estate belonging to them at Ancisa, in the valley of the Arno, about fifteen miles from Florence. The journey to this place proved perilous to the little Francesco, not quite eight months old. On crossing the swollen river, the man who carried him was precipitated from his horse, and nearly borne away by the stream.

During the six or seven years which Eletta passed at Ancisa, her husband continued to visit her for short periods, but with the utmost secrecy and caution. The rest of his time was spent in travelling from city to city, with the hope of finding some place where he might resume, in security, the exercise of his profession.

Concluding, at length, that no change was likely to occur in the state of affairs at Florence, he took up his residence for a short time at Pisa, and thence removed with his wife and family, now consisting of Francesco and two younger sons, to Avignon, the adopted capital of the Roman Pontiffs.*

On arriving in that city, Petracco found there many of his countrymen who, like him, had been driven from Italy by civil discord. Among the few with whom he felt disposed to associate was a Genoese, named Settimo, whose son Guido became Petrarch's earliest companion, and remained through life a faithful and devoted friend. The two families, thus united by similarity of fortune and personal attachment, finding Avignon too expensive a place of residence, determined to remove to Carpentras, a small town in the neighbourhood. There they found the venerable old schoolmaster Conventiole, who, driven from Pisa, was already surrounded by a numerous class of pupils, glad to avail themselves of his learning and experience. But the aged teacher was bowed down by care and infirmity, and his scholars, though they loved him, were chilled by the coldness and languor which betrayed the failure of his powers. Petrarch was among the few who, notwithstanding the feebleness of the master, could still profit largely by the sources of

* "Ubi Romanus Pontifex turpi in exilio Christi tenet Ecclesiam:" so wrote Petrarch of Avignon in after years.—*Epist. de Origine et Vita*. Op. Basil. 1581.

knowledge and eloquence to which he led them. When after sixty years of toil, the aged rhetorician found himself a beggar, Petrarch often emptied his own ill-supplied purse to buy him bread. Sometimes the purse was already empty when the trembling old man renewed his appeal for help. In these cases, Petrarch gave him whatever was available to pawn. On one occasion, he trusted to his hands a precious manuscript of "Cicero de Gloria." This unhappily was never recovered; and it required all the benevolence of which Petrarch was master to keep even him from speaking bitterly of such a loss.

Petracco beheld with delight the early signs of Francesco's genius. While other boys were labouring through some elementary lesson, he was heard repeating favourite passages from poets and orators. But the anxious father could only take pleasure in these proofs of ability, as they encouraged him to hope for his son's future success in life. Little liberty could be exercised, at that time, in the choice of a profession. The civil and canon law was then the only study which offered to men of genius the combined rewards of intellectual and worldly success. It was therefore natural that men like Petracco, with sons like Francesco, should destine them, with the first appearance of mental vigour, to become doctors of law.

Our poet was just fourteen when he entered upon his legal studies at Montpellier. At the end of three years, he had become familiar with all the existing classics, but with few of the great lights of jurisprudence. Disappointed, but still hopeful, Petracco attributed his son's slow advancement rather to want of ability in his teachers than to his own neglect of application. He was immediately removed, therefore, to Bologna. The celebrity of that university as a school of law could not

be surpassed. Francesco sat down steadily to his work. The professors admired his talents, and regarded his exercises as sure proofs of future greatness. But his application was fitful and deceptive. Literature alone engaged his affections; and it happened that in one of those lapses of study to which he was now often subject, his father arrived unexpectedly from Avignon, and entered his chamber without warning. Instead of seeing his table spread with legal charts, he found him wholly occupied with two manuscripts, a Virgil and Cicero. He seemed to have discovered the root of all his former, and still worse future disappointments. A fire was burning on the hearth, and, in a moment, the two manuscripts, old, yellow parchments, were curling in the flames. Petrarch has described the scene in one of his latest letters, with considerable humour. The angry looks of his father, the sight of his manuscripts writhing and crackling on the hearth, at first struck him dumb with horror. A loud and piteous groan was his only expression of distress. Poor Petracco felt all that it told. In an instant more, the manuscripts were snatched from the fire, and this kind and learned man, who valued ancient books almost as much as they were prized by his son, was spared the shame of having done anything worse than giving the Virgil and Cicero a somewhat dusky tint. Laying them on the table, he said, "Well then, Francesco, read Virgil, if it must be so, for your pleasure; but let Cicero not amuse you only, but teach you to labour, and to value law."

Petrarch loved and venerated his father, and the remainder of his four years at Bologna served to qualify him for the exercise of his profession. He pleaded one cause at Bologna, and that successfully. But the good Petracco did not live to rejoice in the accomplishment of

his hopes. His death was shortly followed by that of Eletta; and Petrarch and his only surviving brother were left alone in the world, and free to adopt what course of life might best suit their inclination.

A careful review of their pecuniary circumstances warned them of the necessity of extreme economy, or great exertion.* They were the inheritors of a property small in itself but further diminished in value by the dishonesty of trustees. Both the brothers wished for freedom and indulgence. Neither had ambition enough to contemplate wealth or rank as a sufficient payment for toil. The Church alone offered them a provision for their wants, without exacting of them too great a sacrifice of liberty. They assumed, therefore, the tonsure and the clerical habit. In this first admission to holy orders, the temper of the times, and the loose discipline of the Church, allowed them a very indulgent view of their professional responsibilities. Petrarch, in after years, when writing to his brother, reminded him of the affectation with which they carried their spotless and unruffled robes; how they dressed their hair in nicest trim, and avoided the wind, lest a single lock might be discomposed. Mingled with the gentle satire upon their youthful vanity, there may be detected just a grain of natural pride, when the grand old man, rich now in all the experiences of life, and of matured piety, speaks of the admiration with which they were regarded, and tells how the most accomplished people in Avignon admitted them to their society.

Petrarch did not overstate the popularity which he and his brother Gerhard thus enjoyed. The latter grew weary of the world at an early period, and obeyed the

* "Fortuna mediocri, et, ut verum fatear, ad inopiam vergente."—*Epist. de Origine.*

convictions of his conscience by becoming a monk. But Petrarch continued to pursue the path which his genius, and the encouragement of powerful friends, opened to his ambition. He was animated by the purest love of scholarship. It was not with a mere selfish joy that he discovered how fresh were the fountains of ancient thought. He knew that they might be made the means of giving a nobler, healthier tone to the debased but struggling intellect of the age. Few, and of rare attainment, were the copies of the classics within his reach. But he sought for them, as other men would seek for gold, hidden in deserted houses. There was not a monastery within his reach the library of which he failed to ransack, or a manuscript to be purchased for which he was not willing to pay the highest price in his power. Happily, for him, there were two or three men at Avignon who could appreciate the value of his labours. One of these was an old doctor of law, Raimond Soranzo. "A thorough lawyer," says Petrarch of him, "he really deserved the title which so many others only usurp. But while men of no merit, compared with his, were elevated to the highest dignities, he was allowed to live on neglected, because he had had the courage to oppose the sovereign pontiff, on the side of truth and justice."* This honest jurisconsult had, notwithstanding his want of courtly patronage, found means to collect a very valuable library, rich in the literature of his own calling, but scarcely less so in manuscripts of the classics. These he affected to despise, nothing having much value in his esteem which did not treat of law. The only exception which he made was in favour of Livy. This author he read with care, but not without difficulty; and Petrarch's assistance was

* Fam., lib. xiv. ep. i.; Sen., lib. xv. ep. i.

rewarded by the loan of whatever manuscripts he chose to peruse or copy.

The friendship of John of Florence proved of still greater value to Petrarch at this period of his life. A man who had passed no less than fifty years as Apostolic Secretary, could scarcely fail to possess stores of valuable knowledge. In the case of John of Florence, experience and erudition were combined with genuine piety. He saw and admired Petrarch's ability; but he also saw and lamented the frequent instability of his conduct. Trembling for him, he wrote and spoke to him with the affection of a father. His words made a deep impression on the young ecclesiastic, who, feeling all their worth, could soon after write, "I am sometimes a peripatetician; sometimes a stoic; then I am an academician; then neither the one nor the other. But I am always a Christian. To love wisdom is to be a philosopher; but the true wisdom is Jesus Christ. Let us read historians, poets, philosophers; but let us ever treasure in our hearts the gospel of Christ. That is the true source of wisdom and happiness." *

During all this time, he was obliged to subsist on an income very inadequate to the indulgence of either his scholarly tastes or his social habits. It was, therefore, with no slight pleasure that he found his friendship courted by Giacomo Colonna, who was soon after appointed to the bishopric of Lombez. This excellent and accomplished man had been his fellow-student at Bologna; and though no intimacy existed between them there, the young nobleman had become interested in his favour, both by the intellectual expression of his countenance, and the report of his talents. The branch of the Colonna

* *Varior. Epist.*, xxviii. Opera, 1581.

family, the noblest and most ancient in Italy, to which Giacomo belonged, had resided many years in Avignon. Proud of his new acquaintance, he lost no time in introducing him to the favour of his distinguished relatives. Petrarch had more than enough to satisfy his limited worldly ambition in the patronage of friends like these.

But that which gives freedom from care, the too early luxury of repose, to a mind like Petrarch's, often opens the way to distresses more painful than all that are encountered in the roughest path of wholesome labour. It was not long after his introduction to the Colonna, that Petrarch, early one morning in the Easter week of 1327, entered the church of St. Claire, to take part in the customary devotions. The young and beautiful wife of Hugh de Sade had come to the church for the same purpose. As she knelt down, meek and sincere in her own holy thoughts, the eyes of Petrarch rested upon her exquisite form, her golden hair, her dark eyebrows, her white shoulders. Unhappily for him, he did not allow the truthful expression of her upraised looks to reprove his heart for its earthly movements. He suffered himself to become, on the instant, the slave of a passion which, indulged as it was after he learnt that she was a wife, not all that has been written on the subject can ever dignify or excuse.

No record remains of the events of his life during the next three years. A friendly but severe letter was addressed to him by Cino of Pistoia, a learned professor of law at Bologna. It is difficult to value the talents of Petrarch, and not sympathise with the old professor, lamenting to see him enslaved by an idle fancy, and subject to a patron, instead of fairly working his way to dignity and independence. "I have often" he says, "prayed to the Lord to lead you back to a more profitable

course of life, or else to erase your image from my mind. You must be yourself again, and change your mode of life. Otherwise, I hope never to hear of you again, unworthy as you would seem of having been my pupil. How can you suffer yourself to be deceived by vain appearances? What can your patrons, illustrious though they be, give you as an equivalent for that which you are sacrificing? May the Lord induce you to return to the studies which you have forsaken!"

The orders which Petrarch had taken in the Church would not have prevented his advancement as a doctor of civil and canon law. Nor had he any rooted objection to the study itself. His answer to those who pressed him on the subject was uniformly this: "I venerate the law; but I hate the bar." Nothing, therefore, was left him but to make the best of the patronage offered him by the Colonna. Giacomo had just been nominated to the see of Lombes, a romantic district, in the vicinity of the Pyrenees. Petrarch accompanied him when he went to visit his diocese for the first time. There he was introduced to Lello di Stefano, a young man of talent, descended from an ancient Roman family, and to Luigi, a young Fleming, distinguished for his musical abilities. The friendship of these excellent men, whom he loved to call his Lælius and Socrates, was one of the chief consolations of his declining years.

At Lombes the bishop and he passed the summer, employing themselves in study and conversation, well pleased, on returning to Avignon, to reflect on their short freedom from its turmoils and dissipation. Petrarch now became a constant inmate in the palace of the Cardinal Giovanni Colonna; a man as remarkable for his plain and simple habits, as for his hospitality and liberal kindness to persons of talent. In this dignified abode, our

poet enjoyed the society not only of the most distinguished men of Avignon, but of all the illustrious strangers who visited the Papal Court. Among the latter was the celebrated Richard of Bury, ambassador from our Edward III. It was now also that he became acquainted with the venerable Stephen Colonna, the father of the bishop, and to whose conversation he ascribed his earliest feeling of patriotism, his first dream of Rome restored to freedom and greatness.

There was a strange mingling of passions in his heart at this period. The thought of Laura had become a deep and permanent sentiment. It demanded expression; and hence those sonnets which, inferior as they are to some written at a later period, made him at once famous as a poet, both in France and Italy. Thus his love for Laura, and his literary ambition, became closely united, and might have seemed sufficient to repel any other sentiment from his bosom. But the vision of his country grew every day more and more life-like. He began to love it with all the energy of his affectionate nature. Italy was his birthplace, the proper home of his family, and, more than all, it was now the only spot on earth which seemed to hail with a mother's love the revival of learning and the arts. Even the dreams of infancy, realities to minds like his, added to the strength of these emotions. He had fond recollections of the sweet green valleys, and quiet olive-groves about Ancisa; and he had not forgotten the stately Genoa, or the solemn magnificence of Pisa, the residence of his parents during the last year of their abode in Italy.

Moved by all these feelings, he watched with unceasing anxiety the progress of political events. In the year 1332, a league was formed between the Pope and the King of Bohemia, which threatened to make Italy the victim of a policy as barbarous as it was dark and subtle.

The monarch, after a conference with the Pontiff at Avignon, entered Italy at the beginning of 1333. Petrarch regarding his country as ready to fall, passionately exclaimed, "Has not Italy still the same arms with which she conquered the universe? I tremble for my country. Separated from her by the ocean, I see the storm which threatens her, and seems to expose her to certain shipwreck." To the great joy of the patriot, his fears proved vain, the invaders suffering defeat every step they advanced beyond the Alps.

Petrarch now resolved to seek relief from the agitations of love in travel; and, after some resistance from his patrons, obtained leave of absence to visit Germany, and thence to proceed to Rome. Two letters, written to the Cardinal during his journey, show with what care he made his observations. "Eager," says he, in a letter dated Aix-la-Chapelle, "to see and know everything, I have passed much time in endeavouring to separate the true from the false, struck, as I often am, with astonishment and admiration. When the day has not been sufficient for my researches, I have employed a part of the night. Thus, by seeing and reflecting, I have learned to distinguish truth from fable in the history of this great city." Again: "In the course of my journey, I have seen, it must be confessed, many excellent things. I have examined with care the manners and customs of the countries through which I have passed. I have compared them with our own, and have seen nothing which leads me to regret that I was born in Italy. On the contrary, the farther I travel, the more I love, the more I admire my country. If Plato thanked the gods that his birthplace was in Greece, how much gratitude do we not owe to Heaven that ours was in Italy? There is not a Greek who would now have the assurance to say,

that it is better to be born in Greece than in Italy: it would be the same as to say, that it is better to be born in chains than on a throne. Before Rome existed, the fourth part of Italy, waste and desert, was peopled by Greeks, who gave it the appellation of *Magna Græcia*. What name would they not have given it, after the Romans had destroyed Corinth, ravaged *Ætolia*, taken Argos, Mycænæ, and the other cities of Greece; vanquished Pyrrhus, and triumphed over the kings of Macedonia? In truth, it must be better to be an Italian than a Greek. I do not think any of them would dispute the point with me."

On setting out from Avignon, Petrarch had agreed to return to that city after accomplishing a part of his design, and await the Bishop of Lombes, that they might visit Rome in company. Having, therefore, passed through part of Germany, and traversed the forest of Ardennes, considered in that age an enterprise of no ordinary danger, he arrived at Lyons on the fourth of August. He was there met by a servant of the Cardinal, and learnt that the bishop had already set out from Avignon for Rome. The letter which he immediately dispatched to his friend is very characteristic of his feelings. "I know not," says he, "what name to give either you or your unkind treatment of me. Shall I say you have forgotten your promise? I know you never forget anything. That you have no regard for those who are attached to you? Nothing is so contrary to your character. Shall I say that you have broken your faith? Your veracity is too well known. What then? I must leave it to you—you must be the accused, the witness, and the judge. Answer me this, then, afflicted as I am. Why are you at Rome while I am in France? What have I done, to be thus separated from you? Have you rejected me as a useless burthen? Does my company displease

you? You must decide these questions: but since sorrow and adversity compel me to boast, I will tell you, even with the permission of Lælius and your other friends, that there is no society more agreeable to you than mine, or fitter for your station. Perhaps you fear that I should betray your secrets? But have you found me betraying any of those you have intrusted to me? Can you reproach me with any indiscretion? Even with the slightest imprudence? No person, I venture to say, can keep a secret better than I: in ancient times they would have given me a place in the senate, or among the priests of Ceres. We read that among the ancient Persians nothing was more sacred than fidelity—nothing fairer than silence—nothing more disgraceful than loquacity: the first they kept with death; the second they punished by death. But perhaps you are unwilling to interrupt me in my pursuits? Of what use is it that I have lived with you, if you do not know that I am not like the people of whom Horace speaks, who, extending their views to the future, embrace a thousand projects at one time; or of courtiers, who, meting out their souls, make court to everybody, and love no one? We are often deceived in judging of ourselves, and I may perhaps estimate myself falsely; but of this I am sure, that I desire to be of the number of those philosophers who wish for nothing. I have never desired to please a great many persons, knowing that he who seeks to be like the few, will be hated of the many. In you are centred all my hopes and expectations. You wish perhaps to let me see that they have been ill-placed. If so, I ought to thank you for having now informed me of it, but allowed me to depart without saying anything, instead of letting me learn it from either looks or words which might have too much mortified me; but if you only wished to try me, and to reawaken my zeal, I

confess I am not sufficiently strong to endure such a trial."*

On reaching Avignon, he had the satisfaction to learn that urgent necessity had compelled the bishop to set out for Rome before his return. The contest which the Colonna were at that time waging with their powerful rivals the Ursini rendered his presence in the capital of the utmost importance to his family.

It was now that Petrarch began his visits to Vacluse. He had once before wandered through this famous valley. It was in his boyhood, in company with his father, and Guido Settimo. "Oh!" he then exclaimed, with rapture, "I would give the wealth of cities for this spot!"

In his travels he had traversed with delight the most solitary tracts of country; the gloom of forests, the most deserted plains, the wildest and most rocky valleys, giving him more pleasure than gay and splendid cities; and, though naturally timid and averse to enterprise, he passed through several dangerous provinces without company or protection. In the vale of Vacluse he found a solitude as complete as that of more distant wilds, and that mixture of gloom and beauty which favours by turns the indulgence of devotion, and the visitations of fancy. This retreat is situated at the foot of Monte Ventoso, and is watered by the river Sorga, which here divides itself into several branches. The chasm in which its spring rises is surrounded by a semicircular range of lofty crumbling rocks. When the water overflows its bed, it rushes violently down the stony valley, and presents a strange contrast to the silent and unrippled pool from which they fall. A degree of mystery also attends the fountain, and increases the impressive solemnity of the scene. It has never, it is said, been fathomed, but,

* Epist. Fam., lib. i. ep. 5.

rising without noise or bubble, seems to have its origin in the very foundations of the globe. The small patches of ground left open among the cliffs are carefully cultivated. In the distance, a wide and agreeable prospect opposes itself to the rude rocks which occupy nearly the whole valley of Vaucluse, and the dews and frequent showers for which the neighbourhood is noted, temper the summer heats so as to render it constantly cool and fragrant.

His friend, the Bishop of Lombes, was in the meantime actively engaged at Rome in the struggles of his family. Petrarch continued to correspond with him, and express his earnest desire to join him. The complaints, however, which he made respecting the sufferings of his heart, were answered by the wise prelate in a style which proved him, like a good churchman, to be sceptical on all such subjects. "Your Laura," says he, in a letter written to him in the year 1335, "is but a phantom which your imagination has created, that you may have a subject on which to exercise your muse, and so make yourself a name. Your verses, your love, your sighs, are altogether a fiction; if there be anything whatever real in the matter, it is not your passion for Laura, but your wish for the laurel, after which both your studies and your works prove you are striving. I have been your dupe, dear friend, too long. You have pretended that you wish to visit Rome. I have expected you there with great delight; but my eyes are at length opened. I understand your deceit, yet I cannot help loving you, and wishing you to love me in return." In reply to the part of the letter which we have quoted, Petrarch says: "Would to Heaven that Laura were only an imaginary person, and that my love were but a jest! Alas! it is a madness which it would be difficult long to feign. And

what extravagance would it not be to play such a farce! It is possible, perhaps, to imitate the action, the voice, and gesture of a sick man, but can his look and appearance be copied? How many times have you not seen me pale and trembling with affliction? I know, however, that you are but employing against me your favourite instrument of irony; and it becomes you well; you yield not to any one in its use, not even to Socrates himself. But I hope to cure this malady; time will do it, I trust; and that Saint Augustine, whom I also only seem to love, will furnish me with weapons against a Laura who exists not." The Abbé de Sade observes, in respect to the letter to which this is an answer, "that it is one of those on which some writers have attempted to found the absurd opinion that Laura was not a real person, a notion which the letter of the bishop ought rather to confute."

Petrarch at length set out on his proposed journey to Italy, and the first sight of its coast inspired one of the best and most elevated productions of his muse.* During his residence in Rome, he traversed every scene of classic renown in company with the venerable Giovanni da S. Vito, whose enthusiasm made him equal to support the fatigue of attending his youthful companion. He returned to Avignon in 1337, and formed, it appears, a connexion with some lady of that city, by whom he had a son, who lived to the age of twenty-four, and gave his father no little trouble by the untowardness of his disposition. He had also another child, a daughter, whose filial affection proved his solace to the end of his days.

Tormented with ceaseless inquietude, his conscience ill at ease, his mind harassed by love, ambition, and patriotism, all equally vague, he began to hate both himself and

* "L'aspetto sacro della terra vostra!
Mi fa del mal passato tragger guai."—*Son. II.*

the world. Hoping to find some relief to his wretchedness in complete solitude, he retired to Vaucluse. He was there, he says, to make war with his senses; and his eyes, which had been so long attracted by useless vanities, should behold only the firmament, the rocks, and the water, instead of glittering jewels, and purple and ivory. The cottage he inhabited was adjoining that of an old fisherman, whose wife was his sole attendant, so swarthy and ill-favoured a being that she might have been taken for a native of the Libyan deserts. These were his neighbours, and his only companion was a dog. But he found ample employment for his mind as he wandered through the valley thinking of Italy, or of Laura; and when he returned to his little dwelling, he consoled himself with those mute but most faithful friends, his books. From them he derived light and comfort, some furnishing him with rules how to live well, others consoling him with the relation of noble actions and stirring events, and those of another class instructing him in the sciences.

Amid these occupations he passed day after day, and week after week, keeping silence from morning till night, and hearing no other sounds but the bleating of sheep, the singing of birds, or the murmurs of the fountain as it streamed among the rocks. Nor was his diet unfitting for this retired mode of living. The coarse bread of the fisherman was the staple of his meals, and his greatest luxury a few figs or almonds.

He was not, however, entirely forsaken by his friends. Among those who came most frequently to visit him in his retreat was Guido Settimo, who had been educated with him, and had always cherished for him the most lively regard. A similar affection was shown him by Philip Cabassole, Bishop of Cavaillon, in whose diocese

Vaucluse was situated. Philip was a man of great learning and ability, and deserved the respect which Petrarch had conceived for him. A rare praise when merit of any kind, in those very bad times, had so much less to do with the elevation of churchmen than the caprice of statesmen, or the cliques and nepotism of their own order.

While thus enjoying the solitude of Vaucluse, Petrarch continued to compose numerous sonnets, and not forgetting grander literary projects, he began a history of Rome, which was to embrace the long period that intervened between the foundation of the city and the reign of the Emperor Titus.* To this undertaking, and the ideas of Roman grandeur with which it filled his mind, was owing another, namely, a Latin epic, intended to celebrate the actions of Scipio Africanus, and of which he produced a considerable portion in a few months, to the delight of his admiring, but, in this instance, ill-judging friends. Vaucluse, indeed, was for several, and those the best years of his life, the chief scene of his literary labours; "the history would be a long one," says he, in one of his epistles, "should I attempt to relate all I did there; this, however, I may say, that whatever works I shall leave behind me were either done, commenced, or conceived at Vaucluse."†

But his solitary mode of life, though productive of occasional tranquillity, was not calculated to procure him any permanent relief, and he was sometimes so oppressed with melancholy that his health grew daily worse, and he was tempted to pray for death. While his mind was in this state of agitation he appealed from his books to religion, but his heated imagination not

* Baldelli.

† Epist. ad post.

suffering him to contemplate truth in her own simple majesty, he was near falling a victim to the visionary dogmas which were then in vogue. Denis de Robertis was his principal guide in the study of theology, and if we may believe the declarations of his contemporaries, there were few churchmen of either that or any previous age who excelled Denis in variety of learning and talent. Petrarch first became acquainted with him, it is supposed, in Paris, during his sojourn in which city he confessed to him the violent passion with which he was enchained.* But whether the advice of this learned divine was unfitted to make an impression on the mind of a man like our poet, or that it was attended to for a brief period and then forgotten, certain it is that Petrarch profited less than might have been expected from his counsels. The gloom of his spirit refusing to yield to the suggestions of his faith, his love continued to glow with the same fervour as ever, and his meditations on subjects of religion became tinged with the impressions of his fancy.

The year 1339 was diversified by several circumstances which tended, in some measure, to abstract his thoughts from Laura. It was about this period that the learned monk Bernardo Barlaam arrived at Avignon as the ambassador of the Greek Emperor Andronicus. The immediate object of his mission was to treat with the Pope respecting a settlement of the much agitated dispute respecting the keeping of Easter, to which was mainly owing the schism between the Eastern and Western branches of the Christian Church. The efforts of the ambassador were fruitless; but his visit was of great use to Petrarch. It is disputed whether Barlaam was

* Abbé de Sade.

really a native of Greece; but there is no doubt that he was highly accomplished in all the learning of that country.* The veneration which Petrarch evinced for the poets and philosophers, whose glory he seemed to feel as in part belonging to himself, won his favour, and secured his lasting friendship. During his stay at Avignon, Petrarch spent a great portion of his time in his company, seizing with avidity the precious opportunity for initiating himself in the knowledge of Homer and Plato. In return for the instructions of Barlaam, he gave him lessons in Latin, of which language the ambassador had only an imperfect knowledge. Petrarch is supposed to have derived from him that tincture of Platonism discoverable in most of his subsequent compositions.

About this period, also, his old friend and spiritual adviser, Denis de Robertis, arrived at Avignon, and renewed his exhortations, though with as little effect as before. But, notwithstanding this failure, he was regarded by his pupil with heart-felt veneration, and he returned his attachment by several instances of parental kindness. On leaving Avignon for Naples, he promised to recommend him to King Robert, whose learning and virtues made him respected by all the learned men of Europe. Denis fulfilled his promise, and the king, already acquainted with the genius of Petrarch, wrote to him shortly after, and requested his advice respecting an epitaph for the tomb of a favourite niece, who died when young. Petrarch's answer to this letter was that of a courtier, rather than of a scholar and philosopher.

But the introduction which he had thus secured to the most powerful member of the literary republic, and the increasing reputation of his poems, contributed to spur

* Tiraboschi, vol. v. lib. iii. p. 456.

his ambition forward to attempts which the retiring character of his disposition would otherwise have prevented him from making.

Learning at its revival, like all other novelties, was an object of wonder and admiration. It was a new sun in the moral hemisphere, and even those who could not understand either whence it derived its brightness, or in what its precise glory consisted, were led to regard the elect few who understood its mysteries with veneration, and even awe. The ability to trace back the course of things to ages the most remote—to describe the manners of generations that had been swept away from men's memories; to exorcise even the mighty spirits of the olden time, and make them reveal what they thought and saw in the days of inspiration—this was, indeed, a wonderful power to people who had not been made familiar with such things by the universal diffusion of books and knowledge. And those who exercised it were not unworthy of the high honour which they received. They were, many of them, believed to have the faculty of changing the course of nature; of foretelling events, and making the powers of other worlds obedient to their will. But the admiration which this belief acquired for them with the vulgar, was not so high as that which they deserved for what they did in reality. They exercised a magic, but it was that which the Providence of Heaven had taught them; and, instead of merely commanding the spirits of the deep to do their temporary bidding, they bound them in the everlasting bonds of truth and science.

But the vague, though vivid admiration for learned men, and especially for poets, which prevailed among the people, led to the institution of festivals which might be suited to their comprehension, and figure by the splendour

of shows and ceremonies, the intellectual excellences which in itself they were unable to apprehend. To this, probably, was owing the public crowning of poets, which was supposed to invest him who obtained that honour with a superiority over all his less favoured contemporaries. The ceremony, however, had not been known of late; and Petrarch could find only classical examples for the custom which he wished to see reestablished in his favour. It is not improbable that the gay festivals of the Provençals first inspired him with the idea of attempting to revive the coronation of poets. In his journey to Lombes with the bishop, he is said to have been present at one of the contests for the golden violet, and to have been greatly delighted with the display.

But whatever were the motives by which he was instigated, Petrarch left no means unemployed to obtain the honour of a coronation. To this end, he carefully cultivated the friendship of the great and the influential; and, impelled by the same motive, pursued his studies with the ardour of a young man labouring for academical conquests. So closely indeed did he apply himself, that his friends trembled for his health, and the Bishop of Cavaillon, obtaining the key of his study, locked up his books, prohibiting his reading or writing for ten days. Petrarch was obliged to yield an unwilling obedience to the prelate; but the first day of his literary Lent seemed longer to him than a year, the second he suffered a violent headache from morning to night, and the third he was attacked with symptoms of a fever, which the bishop seeing, desisted from attempting to cure him by depriving him of his books. In a letter written about this time, in which he describes his manner of living, he says that he devoted six hours to sleep, and two to supplying the necessary wants of nature; but that even

during his meals he either read or dictated. While walking or travelling he had his mind occupied in designing or making additions to some poem or other work: he never went into the country without taking a pen and paper with him, and he would often rise in the middle of the night, and write down without a light the thoughts which came into his mind.*

At length the day arrived for reaping the reward of all these toils and exertions. While walking in his orchard at Vaucluse on the morning of the 23rd of August, 1340, a letter was brought him from the Senate of Rome, announcing its determination to confer upon him the laurel crown. His delight was extreme on receiving this long-desired intelligence. To increase the glory of his triumph, the day had not passed before another messenger arrived from Robert Bardi, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, inviting him to proceed without delay to that city, where the honours of a public coronation were also awaiting him.

It was not easy for Petrarch to decide at once to which of the capitals he should give the preference. Novelty inclined him in favour of Paris, ancient custom made him prefer Rome—in the one he would find a friend, but in the other a country†; and from the latter he accordingly determined to receive the crown.

But ambitious as he had been to acquire the distinction which awaited him, he was not without apprehensions as to his qualification for so high an honour. This at least he himself asserted, and to secure his mind from any uneasiness on the subject, he resolved to undergo a public examination by the King of Naples, before pro-

* Abbé de Sade, *Mémoires*, t. i. lib. ii. p. 425.

† Opera, p. 1251. Basil, 1581.

ceeding to Rome. Shortly after forming this resolution he set out on his journey, and was received by Robert, to whose influence his success was mainly owing, with princely attention. In the long conversations which they held together, their mutual esteem was greatly increased, and the king graciously acknowledged that he was not less gratified than Petrarch at the acquaintance which Denis de Robertis had procured him.

On the day appointed, the monarch assembled his whole court to be present at the examination. Every species of science and literature furnished the erudite sovereign with questions, his ready answers to which made Petrarch an object of admiration to all present. For three days the examination was thus carried on to the credit of both the king and the poet, and on the third, the former pronounced the candidate to be in every way worthy of the honours with which he was about to be invested. Robert would fain have persuaded Petrarch to be crowned at Naples, but not pressing this wish against the prejudice of the latter in favour of the Roman Capitol, he bade him an affectionate farewell, telling him that his infirmities alone prevented his accompanying him, and sending his friend Giovanni Barrili to attend him as his representative. At the same time he took off his royal robe, and presenting it to him, told him to wear it at the approaching ceremony. Early in the morning of Easter-day, 1341, the streets of Rome resounded with trumpets, and the shouts of multitudes thronging to witness the novel sight of a poet's coronation. The favoured bard, as he proceeded to the Capitol, was attended by eighteen young and noble Romans, twelve of whom were habited in scarlet robes, the rest in green. The Senator and chief officers of state came next, and, thus escorted, he passed through

the principal public avenues, to the scene of his triumph. The streets had been thickly strewn with flowers, and the windows of every house were filled with ladies, who, while the songs and music of those who accompanied the procession made the whole seem like a magic show, flung the richest perfumes from the balconies, and so freely, it is said, that the essences thus expended would have served even Spain itself for a year. Arrived at the Capitol, Petrarch, formally summoned by a herald, briefly addressed the assembled multitude; and to their repeated cheers responded by a loud "Viva lo popolo Romano!" He then knelt down, and the Senator placing a crown of laurel on his head, proclaimed him Prince of poets. Rising amid the applauses of the spectators, he immediately recited a sonnet on the heroes of Rome, and was then conducted from the Capitol to St. Peter's. There, taking off his crown before the altar, he made it an offering to heaven, and having finished his devotions, proceeded to the palace of Stephen Colonna, where the chief personages of Rome awaited him at a sumptuous banquet. After spending a few days among his friends, and receiving a diploma from the Senate, which designated him poet, historian, and citizen of Rome, he set out on his return to Avignon. Taking the route by Parma, he visited Azzo da Correggio, now on the point of seizing the principality in defiance of the rights of an elder branch of his family, but justifying the violence by the purposed wisdom and mildness of his government. The only case in which Petrarch had publicly exercised his profession as a lawyer, was that in which he pleaded the cause of Azzo and his family against the rival claims of the Rossi. His success increased the admiration which Azzo already entertained for his character. Some years had passed since they

last met ; and it was with the warmest expression of friendship and delight that Azzo hailed his unexpected appearance at Parma.

Petrarch had contemplated only a visit of some few days. But he found Parma and the neighbourhood well suited to his taste. Among the inhabitants were many persons of great learning and ability, and the surrounding country afforded him a ready retreat from all the turmoils of the world. In one of his long, solitary rambles, he reached a forest, which, clothing the sides and summits of a mountain, seemed created to be the asylum of peace and meditation. Through its long vistas might be seen the snow-clad Alps, and interminable plains, covered with populous towns, and richly cultivated farms. Here his mind recovered its natural tone. He poured out streams of spontaneous verse ; and the palace of Azzo was exchanged, during some weeks, for a lodging on the borders of the *Sylva Piana*. Another ramble, not so far from the city, brought him to the gate of a cottage, standing in the midst of a garden, and sheltered by a small plantation, through which flowed a murmuring stream of pellucid water. The house was to be let. Petrarch forgot, for the moment, Avignon and all its concerns. He hired the cottage ; was soon after made archdeacon of Parma ; and, purchasing the spot, rebuilt the house for his permanent residence.

But his hopes of tranquillity were premature. As Canon of Lombes, he knew that it would be necessary for him to revisit that city at no distant period. His ardent friendship for the bishop would have prompted him to hasten his journey ; but he knew that they might meet at Avignon, or even in Italy.

It may be that Petrarch's thoughts were more than usually occupied with this subject, but, strange to say,

while sound asleep one night, he thought he beheld his friend passing over the little stream which watered his garden. He ran to him, asked him whence he came so unexpectedly, whither he was going, and why he was alone? The bishop returned an answer signifying that, like him, he had grown weary of the continual storms and gloom which pervaded his mountainous retreat. Conversing in this manner, they seemed to approach the end of the garden, when Petrarch begged permission to accompany him, but his friend warned him back with his hand, and with a changed countenance and voice said solemnly, "Depart! I do not wish you to be my companion yet." Twenty-five days after this dream, intelligence arrived at Parma that the bishop was dead, and that his decease had taken place on the very day in which Petrarch had been so singularly affected.

His grief at the loss of his friend was extreme. "We have lived too long," says he, in a letter to Lælius, who had witnessed the last hours of the prelate; "we have lost the best of masters, the tenderest of fathers. What course shall I pursue?—what will become of me? I am a mere stranger at Parma, every instant on the move. Shall I go to Lombes where I am canon? It is a savage, inhospitable country, and I have now lost the only person who could have rendered it tolerable to me. How could I endure to look on the tomb where all my hopes lie buried? How could I bear to kiss the hands of a proud and barbarous pontiff instead of that master's who was so dear to me? Shall I return to Avignon, to place myself again in the court of the Cardinal? How dull, how melancholy must everything appear there now it has lost its greatest ornament!"

The plans which Petrarch had formed seem to have been entirely disarranged by the death of his friend.

But so much was his society desired by the Cardinal, that his commands put him under the immediate necessity of returning to Avignon. After having spent, therefore, nearly a year at Parma, which is stated to have been among the happiest and most serene he ever enjoyed, he set out for Avignon, which he reached in health and safety, and was received with open arms by his old friends Lælius and Socrates.

The society of these his earliest acquaintances, and the attentions which his fame procured him from all quarters, rendered his situation at Avignon much more agreeable than he had expected. Even Laura herself was moved by the intelligence of her admirer's glory, and when she met him, her countenance wore a more benign aspect than before his journey to Rome.

Little is known either of this, or of any period of her domestic history. It is, however, generally agreed that her marriage was not a happy one; that her husband was harsh and unkind, and the cares of her large family too great for her delicate constitution. At the time of which we are speaking, she was about thirty years of age; but few traces of her youthful loveliness now existed even in the eyes of her ardent admirer; she was pale and languid, and had altogether the air of a person suffering under the premature advances of age. Petrarch himself also had for some time exhibited symptoms of declining strength. His hair had long been grey, and his features were expressive of a gravity strikingly contrasted with the youthful appearance of his figure.

But this year, 1342, called for his attention in affairs which nearly interested his feelings as a patriot. Benedict XII., after an inglorious pontificate, died unlamented even by churchmen, who had the least pretension to learning or refinement.

The new Pope, Clement the Sixth, was a man of totally different character and temper. Elegant in his manners, voluptuous in his disposition, fond of literature and the arts, and a general admirer of women, his court shortly presented a scene of constant gaiety and dissipation. But the favours which he bestowed on men of learning, and his general good taste, induced Petrarch and others of the Italian party to hope that he might be persuaded to remove the seat of his authority to Rome. Petrarch, with whom was now associated the famous Nicholas Gabrini, better known by the name of Rienzi, used all his influence and eloquence as a Roman citizen to effect this favourite purpose, but in vain; Clement heard the appeal with politeness, but refused to accord the desired grace. Some blame, it is said, was due to Petrarch for the bad success of the attempt. The principal arguments on which he rested his plea for removing the see to Rome, were drawn from recollections of saints and apostles, and from the blood with which holy martyrs had consecrated its soil: whereas, if the portrait of Clement be correctly given by contemporary historians, the orator should have omitted these topics for others of a more agreeable character, and have fascinated the Pope's imagination with a view of the superior delights which sunny Italy could afford to those of any part of France.*

While his mind was yet suffering under the impression of melancholy for the loss of friends, Petrarch undertook and completed his "Dialogues with St. Augustine," a work deeply imbued with mysticism, but devout, eloquent, and valuable as an exposition of the sentiments of his heart. Even the essays of Montaigne are not more interesting in this respect than the dialogues of Petrarch.

* Abbé de Sade.

So fully did he explain in them the motives of his actions and the feelings in which they originated, that he applied to the work the title of "My Secret," and seems to have intended that it should not be published till after his death.*

These remarkable discourses consist of three dialogues; in the first, the saint lays down certain general rules of reasoning, such as, that our being miserable or happy depends on our own conduct; that the true desire of escaping from our miseries comes with the knowledge of their nature and extent; that this desire can only exist in its full force when all other desires are extinguished, and that this can never take place till the thought of death has detached the mind from worldly objects. On these different points Petrarch and his teacher make various observations, the one acknowledging his indetermination to pursue that which he knows to be good and desires to obtain; the other placing before him, in the strongest language, his extreme vanity, his avarice, ambition, incontinence, and misanthropy. The discussion on these subjects occupies the first two dialogues; the third contains a more particular enumeration of the penitent's errors and infirmities. He was bound, says the saint, by two chains which he forgot to regard as chains, though truly so, because of their deceptious brightness,—they were love and glory; and Augustine teaches him, in the plainest language, that he had been playing the part of a madman to suffer himself for so many years to be the object of a vain and guilty passion; to yoke his immortal soul to a frail perishing form of earth, which death would deprive of all its loveliness. Petrarch would have defended himself by replying, that it was not the earthly form of Laura which had enchained his heart, but the

* Opera, t. i. p. 374. Basil 1581.

beauty and virtue of her soul. Augustine confesses that this is a strong point of defence, but observes that, if Laura were Virtue herself, he was not the less guilty if his own passion partook of the slightest impurity. To this Petrarch replies, that there was nothing criminal in his love but its excess; that he could wish his love to be seen, even as her countenance could be seen, for there was a close resemblance between them, both being pure and spotless; that to his love for her he owed his glory and reputation; and that his heart, purified by its passion for a woman so angelically virtuous, had, by that means, been preserved from the worst vices of its nature.

Augustine, however, is unmoved by these arguments, and insists that Laura only saved him from the hazard of a slight fall to plunge him in an abyss—that he had no reason to thank her for making him ambitious of glory, and that she had, in fact, put his soul in peril of destruction. “Instead of loving the Creator, you have devoted yourself to the creature; and if you say that she has taught you to love God, then you are guilty of having inverted the right order of things, for the Creator must be loved for Himself alone, and the creature for Him. As it now is, you have only loved God as you would admire a good workman who has made something which delights you. With regard to the present nature of your love for Laura, it may be enfeebled by years, but it is neither extinguished, nor in reality more pure.”*

The saint then presses several other considerations of a similar nature upon his disciple; and it is curious to find that the idea of seeking another object of love had passed through the mind of Petrarch. But it is on the increase of his years that Augustine is made to expatiate with the greatest earnestness; he bids him observe how

* Abbé de Sade, t. ii. liv. iii. p. 103.

his hair is growing grey, and asks him whether he is not ashamed of making love with white locks. "I blush for and repent my folly," replies Petrarch, "but I can do no more; Laura, too, is growing old with me—that consoles me and abridges my feeling of shame." The speakers then pass to the consideration of the desire of glory, and Augustine assures his disciple that he is wasting his life in the pursuit of a shadow, that fame is uncertain and changeable, and that the only renown worth seeking for is that which virtue bestows. "Leave Africa and Scipio, then," concludes he, "examine yourself, think of death, and of the life which is to come."

Petrarch was called from these ascetic studies to take part in the political affairs which had just now excited the jealousy of the pontifical court. The King of Naples, lately dead, had directed that a Council of Regency should be formed for the government of the kingdom till his grand-daughter, the successor to the throne, should have attained her majority. Clement considered this as an infringement on his rights; and in order, if possible, to re-establish them, he determined on sending an ambassador to Naples to support his pretensions. The acquaintance which Petrarch had formed with the court, and his high reputation there, pointed him out as the fittest person that could be found for the mission, and in September 1343, he set out on his way to Italy.

On arriving at Naples, he found that city even worse sunk in depravity than Avignon. Under the young queen, herself weak and profligate, vice of every description had been suffered to gain ground in society; and finding it impossible to effect the purpose for which he was sent, Petrarch left it in extreme disgust, and proceeded to Parma. He remained but a short time. The country was everywhere disturbed with civil war,

and he was obliged to escape from the city under shelter of the night. A fall from his horse served considerably to increase his danger, but he at last succeeded in making his way to Bologna, whence he proceeded to Verona, and thence to Avignon. Clement, in testimony of his esteem for the talents which he had employed in his service, offered him a bishopric, or the post of pontifical secretary; but so strong was his love of liberty that he rejected both proposals, preferring to pursue his studies in freedom to the wealth and influence which he might have derived from either of the above appointments.*

In the year 1347, intelligence was received at Avignon, that Cola di Rienzi had become invested, under the title of Tribune, with the absolute government of Rome. The Pontiff and his court were filled with dismay; but Petrarch could think of nothing but of Rome free, and restored to her ancient magnificence and rank. Full of these sentiments, he wrote to Rienzi, congratulating him on his success, and exhorting him to pursue a line of conduct which would heap so much glory on himself, and raise the capital of the world to its former preeminence among nations.* Not content with thus counseling him at a distance, he resolved to hasten to Rome, that he might share in his triumphs, and aid him by the utmost exertion of his abilities. His friends heard of this determination with regret. Even Laura, it is said, when he obtained permission to bid her farewell, changed countenance, and expressed sorrow at his resolution. She was with some of her usual acquaintances when this parting took place: she wore no ornaments—was pale and melancholy, and her whole appearance more dejected than he had ever seen it. Petrarch was affected, even

* Opera, t. i. p. 595.

to weeping, at observing these expressions of Laura's feeling, and left her without the power of saying adieu. The impression which her parting look made on his mind was never effaced.

When he arrived at Genoa, the unwelcome news reached his ears that Rienzi was destroying his new edifice of liberty and glory as rapidly as he had constructed it. Instead, therefore, of pursuing his intended route, he proceeded to Parma, where he received the horrible intelligence that, by the order of the Tribune, nearly all the Colonna had been put to a violent death. This flagitious act, and the subsequent conduct of Rienzi, at length convinced Petrarch that he had been miserably deceived in the estimate of his ability or virtue. He therefore continued his journey from Parma to Verona, where he was residing when the earthquake happened, which almost shook to their foundations Pisa, Bologna, Padua, and Venice. On the night when it occurred, June 25th, 1348, he was sitting in his study—his books were suddenly flung from the shelves—the walls of the room seemed closing on him, while the loud noise and the violent shaking of the ground beneath his feet, almost deprived him of his senses. But the recollection of this event was effaced by the ravages of the plague, which soon after spread, not only throughout Italy, but over the better part of Europe.

It was with great alarm that Petrarch at length heard that the pestilence had reached the neighbourhood of Avignon. His mind, long oppressed with anxiety for the health of Laura, had indulged the most melancholy reflections, which the recollection of her sorrow at parting served to render doubly distressing. So long, however, as he continued to receive intelligence respecting the real progress of the disease at Avignon, his

anxiety was supportable ; and every messenger that brought intelligence of Laura's being yet safe, encouraged him to hope that she might escape the scourge.

But this relief was shortly after denied him. The plague gathered fresh strength day after day, and now raged with such violence, that all intercourse was prevented between the neighbouring cities. Frightful dreams were the only messengers Petrarch received respecting the fate of Laura. In his sleep he fancied that he saw her fall a victim to the disease, and heard her bid him farewell in the sweetest but most melancholy expressions. These visions gained complete possession of his mind, and he ceased to cherish the faintest hope of ever seeing her again. His apprehensions proved true—Laura died of the plague on the very day in the month of April in which they had first met, and during the night when he imagined she appeared to bid him farewell.

The accounts which have been drawn from the scanty memorials of Laura's last moments bear striking testimony to the purity of her character. It was on the 3rd of April that she felt the first symptoms of illness ; and, though it was doubtful whether they were indications of fatal malady, she immediately prepared herself for the worst, by receiving the sacraments, and composing her mind to religious meditation. The disorder left little time for doubt as to its real nature ; and, by the sixth of the month, it had made such progress, that not the slightest hope remained of her recovery. But dreaded as was the disease with which she was attacked, and while other sufferers were left to die unattended, her couch was surrounded by all her friends and relations, anxious to catch her last words and minister to her comfort. Death stole upon her rapidly, but without its

usual fearfulness. It pervaded her veins, without disturbing the sweet serenity of her countenance ; and, after addressing those around her with calm and happy assurances of her faith, and of trust in eternal life, she expired amid the lamentations of all who had known her, and were best able to judge of her actions and character. She had borne eleven children, nine of whom survived her ; but, as has been intimated, she enjoyed less domestic happiness than her virtue and prudence entitled her to expect. Of her person Petrarch has left numberless descriptions, but all too bright and sparkling to give a distinct idea of its actual features. According to him, however, her hair was of a golden brightness—her complexion purer than the virgin snow—her eyes so vividly sparkling, that they resembled the stars ; but withal so soft and tender in their expression, that they inspired only feelings of love and reverence. In stature she was tall, and exquisitely graceful in her carriage ; her voice was clear and musical, and her manner of conversing equally indicative of dignity and sweetness. The splendour of her dress corresponded to her beauty. Belonging to the noblest class of society, she was usually seen apparelled in the costliest robes, richly ornamented with jewels. Sometimes her vest was of purple, embroidered with flowers of gold, and bordered with azure ; at others, her delicate form seemed enshrined amid roses, and richly adorned with precious pearls and diamonds. Her hair was generally left to flow loose over her neck and shoulders, but it was sometimes fastened up in a knot, and parted plainly on her forehead. Of her mental endowments it is said that, though she had derived few advantages from study, she had so much natural intelligence and such a ready flow of wit, that she was superior to most other women even in point of intellect.

In a manuscript Virgil, preserved in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, and originally belonging to Petrarch, is a memorandum written in his own hand, and in which he thus simply and affectionately records the date of Laura's death, and of their first meeting.*

"Laura, illustrious by her own virtues, and widely celebrated in my verses, first met my eyes while I was yet a youth, on the morning of the 6th of April, in the year 1327, and in the church of St. Claire, at Avignon. And in the same city, in the same month, on the same day of the month, and at the same hour, but in the year 1348, she was taken from this world, while I, alas! was at Verona, ignorant of her fate! But intelligence of the fatal event was sent me by my friend Louis to Parma, where it reached me on the morning of the 19th of May. Her most chaste and beauteous body was deposited the same evening in the church of the Minor Friars, but her soul, I am persuaded, returned, as Cicero says of Africanus, to heaven, whence it came. It seemed good to me to record, as I do, with melancholy pleasure, this sad event; and in a place which most frequently meets my eye, that I may be admonished by it to value nothing more in this world, but that, being free from bondage, I may escape altogether from Babylon, and be taught by contemplation and a right view of the uncertainty of life, boldly and decidedly to employ the grace of God in properly considering the vanity of my past pursuits!"

The sentiments expressed in this memorandum are sufficient to show the state of Petrarch's mind at the time it was written; and from this period we seem to behold him under the influence of feelings which had

* Tiraboschi, t. v. lib. iii p. 532.

been long struggling for mastery, but had never, till now, promised to be permanent.

The death of Laura was shortly followed by that of the Cardinal Colonna, who, it is probable, died of the plague, to which five other cardinals successively fell victims. It has been thought that his death was accelerated by the grief with which he beheld the rapid desolation of his noble house. In the course of five years he had lost his mother and six of his brothers, and found himself and the aged Stephen Colonna the sole survivors of a family which had so short a time before been the most powerful in Italy. When Petrarch was once conversing at Rome with old Stephen Colonna, the latter observed, with tears in his eyes, and a look that seemed prophetic of coming ills, "I should have wished, and by the natural course of things I ought, to leave my children successors to my estates, but fate has willed it otherwise—the order of nature is reversed, and I, a feeble, decrepit old man, shall be left the heir of my children." Some time after this, and just before the eldest brother of the Cardinal was assassinated, Petrarch was talking with the latter on the subject of the misfortunes with which his family seemed threatened. In the course of the conversation, he observed, "Your father foresaw these calamities; I now remember what he once said to me at Rome." The Cardinal having heard the prediction, remarked with a sigh, "My father will prove a true prophet!" His death, which happened at the period of which we are now speaking, fulfilled the prophecy, and old Stephen Colonna followed him to the tomb.

Avignon had now no claim to Petrarch's regard; he had always abhorred its dissipation, and the court of the Pope was, on this account, as hateful to him as the city. Laura and the Cardinal, with the friends who were col-

lected round him, could alone have induced him to spend any part of his life in a place so foreign to his tastes.

Free, for a time, from any urgent claim of duty, he employed his leisure in visiting various parts of Italy. In 1350, he took part in the jubilee at Rome. On his way, he spent some time at Florence, where he met Boccaccio, whose acquaintance he had already formed during his stay in Naples.

Not long after leaving Florence, a kick from the horse of his travelling companion inflicted on him an injury, which obliged him on arriving at Rome to remain some days in bed. He thus laments his confinement in a letter to Boccaccio:—"Repose is necessary to my recovery, but it is trouble to me! Alas! the melancholy days I am confined to my bed appear longer at Rome than they would anywhere else. I cannot refrain without difficulty from inspecting the wonders of this queen of cities. The more I consider them, the more easy am I to believe all that history has recorded of her glory. One reflection, however, somewhat consoles me in my affliction, and this is, that I regard what has happened to me as a just punishment from God, who, after having strengthened my wavering soul, has ordained that my body should suffer. My confessor treated me with too much lenity. I had need of this mortification to supply his deficiencies. If my accident grieves you, the fortitude with which I have borne my pain ought to console you."

On his return from Rome, he stopped some time at Arezzo, the place of his nativity, and was treated by the inhabitants with all the honour they could render. During his stay, he had the satisfaction of discovering a manuscript of Quintilian, which he had long sought for, but had despaired of finding. As he was leaving the town, the respect of the people was shown in a manner

which greatly affected him. Diverging from the direct road, they led him to a small house, and informed him that it was there he had first seen the light; that the proprietor had often attempted to make alterations in it, but that they had always prohibited it, and that it was now precisely in the same state in which it was on the day of his birth.

When he arrived at Florence, he found his friends anxiously expecting him, and sedulously employed in promoting his most important interests. Hitherto the government had resisted all appeals made to it for the restoration of his paternal estate. It now formally reversed the decree of confiscation. He had just returned to Padua when this business was concluded. Boccaccio hastened after him, being authorised, at the same time, to offer him the presidency of the newly established University. Petrarch was grateful for this unexpected favour, and for some time appeared inclined to accept the office which had been offered him, but finally declined it.

From Padua he went to Venice, where he became acquainted with the celebrated Doge, Andrea Dandolo, and exerted his eloquence to demonstrate the policy of pacific measures with regard to Genoa. He represented to Dandolo that Venice and Genoa together might for ever remain mistresses of the sea; that they were the luminaries of Italy; that a certain peace was far preferable to an uncertain victory, which when gained over a warlike nation, was always bloody; and that if they were desirous of exercising their valour, it would be infinitely better to turn their attention to the East, where a wide field was open for conquest, and on which they might spend the fire of their courage with effect. His exhortations were useless. The Doge praised his zeal and eloquence, but pursued his own line of action, indif-

ferent as well to the warnings as to the persuasions of the orator.*

Though treated with respect approaching to veneration, in the places where he made his sojourn, and enjoying with unfailing delight the charms of his native country, its disturbed state made him desirous of escaping to a more tranquil abode. Vacluse again appeared to his fancy enriched with a thousand beauties, conferred by the security and peace of its solitudes.

Thither accordingly he now hastened ; but it was only for about a month after his return to France, that he remained free to enjoy his beloved retreat. The Pope highly esteemed his wisdom, and again required his advice on the measures to be pursued in the present posture of Italian affairs. He obeyed the summons, and the epistle in which he unfolds his sentiments is among the noblest productions of his pen. From his earliest years, his mind had been intent upon seeing Rome restored to the rights which belonged to her as the abode, first, of the greatest and mightiest of the earth, and next of the wisest and the holiest. Every Pope during whose reign he lived, heard his eloquent lamentations on the degradation of the eternal city. His language to them was free and even severe, and did we fail of other proofs to demonstrate the elevation of his mind, the boldness and noble enthusiasm with which he addressed successive Pontiffs would be sufficient for our purpose. On this subject he spoke, without the slightest variation, from the true sentiments of his heart. At Avignon he might have enjoyed as much wealth and distinction as would have satisfied the most ambitious : he had at his command the highest offices of the pontifical court ; and his eloquence

* Tiraboschi, t. v. lib. ii. p. 417.

had an ample field for its generous display. But no consideration, either of ambition, or vanity, or love, all of which exercised no little influence on his mind, could repress the indignation with which he beheld a licentious city of France exalted by churchmen into a base rivalry with Rome. Italy, at large, possessed his most ardent affections. It was the true rival of his mistress, and to render it happy, continued to the last the ruling passion of his bosom. It is hence that his appeals to the Popes were so powerful, and that he dared to speak without hesitation or reserve.

A ridiculous controversy with the court physicians occurred about this time. Clement complained to Petrarch that his doctors were very slow in curing his infirmities. Whether out of the mere pride of learning, or, as was not uncommon in that age with men of letters, he really possessed a superior knowledge of medicine, Petrarch immediately wrote to the Pope accusing the physicians, in no measured terms, of the grossest ignorance. Clement, for the jest's sake, showed the letter to the parties alluded to, and the unfortunate writer immediately found himself in a nest of hornets. Wit, learning, and even abuse, were employed in the defence. Only a portion of the "Invectives," as Petrarch denominated his answers, remains. It does no credit either to his good sense or good breeding.

Soon after involving himself in this mischievous controversy, he again retired to Vacluse, where solitude, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of tranquillity, speedily restored his mind to its accustomed state of feeling. He was still residing there when intelligence was brought him of the death of Clement, who was succeeded by Innocent VII., a man whose ignorance was so great that he regarded Petrarch as a magician. The friends of

our poet had done everything in their power to make him accept the office of pontifical secretary, which Clement, a short time previous to his death, had again offered him. He refused it with the same firmness as formerly, but his rejection was not allowed to be founded on any valid reason, and he was at last driven to make use of an observation which some critics had passed upon his style, and confess that his manner of writing was too florid for the concise and unadorned documents which should proceed from an apostolic secretary. To this it was immediately answered, that he could easily simplify his style, and he was compelled to make the trial ; but so strongly did he tincture his first official paper with high sounding expressions, that the artifice was, for a time, successful. On the accession, however, of the new Pope his friends determined to renew the attack ; but it was still more impossible than ever to move him, and he remained shut up in his cottage, refusing all entreaties to return to Avignon, or even to see his Holiness, so great was the dislike which he had conceived for his character.

Besides writing several of his most admired sonnets during his present residence at Vacluse, he carried on a very extensive correspondence with his friends in Italy, all appealing to him for advice in their affairs, whether public or private, of any difficulty, and always receiving from him answers which proved the readiness of his zeal and affection in their service. To this period may also be ascribed, though not without some question, his famous "Epistle to Posterity."

Having thus spent the latter part of 1352, and the spring of the following year, in a manner perfectly suited to his taste, his eyes were again turned affectionately towards Italy, whither he determined to proceed without delay. Naples, Venice, and Rome had all equal claims

upon his regard, and he had crossed the Alps before he could fix on the place of his future residence. In this state of uncertainty he reached Milan, where he intended to remain a few days and then resume his journey. But Giovanni Visconti was at that time archbishop and lord of Milan, and his love of learning and its professors was too great to suffer such a man as Petrarch to leave his city unless called away by great necessity. In the most gracious manner, therefore, he pressed him to prolong his stay, and make Milan his home. Petrarch resisted his arguments as long and resolutely as he could, but finding Giovanni impenetrable to excuses, he was obliged to yield to his persuasions.

He had no reason to repent of having done so. A house was prepared for him in the healthiest part of the town, and he was suffered to live in every respect as his inclination prompted. He had neither office nor title, nor duties to perform; and though honoured with admission to the council-table whenever he chose to take his seat at it, he was neither obliged to attend, nor forced to burthen himself with any part of the business when present. This was the way to preserve Petrarch contented with his residence, and Giovanni never better proved himself an able politician than in this treatment of his celebrated guest. He had the character of being the haughtiest and most absolute of Italian princes. His severe and resolute policy, to which he owed his elevation, and the preservation of his power, made him regarded as the tyrant of Lombardy; and when the Pope attempted to humble him by attacking him as a bishop, he proudly intimated to the legate that, whenever necessary, he could support his spiritual by his temporal power.

After enjoying a few months of tranquillity, Petrarch

was requested by Giovanni in 1354, to undertake an embassy to Venice, now actively engaged in destructive hostilities against the Genoese. He was already, as we have seen, well known to the Doge, and possessed the advantage of many acquaintances at his court; he, therefore, encouraged himself with the hope of almost certain success, and of thus having it in his power to prove his esteem for a prince who had so hospitably entertained him. But his fate, in this case, was like that of Dante. His eloquence proved wholly ineffective. Andrea Dandolo persisted in following his own counsels; and Venice, by a change in the tide of affairs, was in a short time placed in the same condition as Genoa had been when that state solicited the interference of the Visconti.

Petrarch was greatly hurt at the failure of his mission, but the feeling of disappointment was quickly lost in one of a deeper kind. Soon after his return he had to regret the death of his kind and generous host. The three nephews of Giovanni succeeded to his authority, and in Galeazzo especially, Petrarch found another friend and patron.

These events were followed by the arrival at Mantua of the Emperor Charles IV., on whom Petrarch had placed his best hopes for Italy. He had no sooner arrived than the poet was summoned to the Imperial presence. During the whole of the time that Charles remained at Mantua, he was his constant companion, and every moment that could be stolen from public business the monarch devoted to the enjoyment of his conversation. Petrarch's account of their interviews, in one of his epistles, is highly interesting, as showing the perfect freedom with which the discourse was carried on, and which did honour to the Emperor as well as to Petrarch. The Emperor received him, he says, in a man-

ner which partook neither of Imperial pride, nor of the etiquette common to the Germans. He never made him feel the superiority of his rank, but lived with him as if he had been his equal. He spoke of his works, and manifested a wish to see them, especially that on *Illustrious Men*. To this Petrarch replied, that it was not yet completed, and that he required time and quiet to put the last hand to it. Upon which Charles intimated that he should be glad to have it appear under his name; "But," says the poet, "I answered with that freedom which nature has given me, and which age and custom have confirmed and authorised,—'Great Prince, to have it appear, and under your name, there is need of virtue on your part and of leisure on mine.'" Astonished, as was natural in a monarch, at an answer so little flattering, the Emperor desired him to explain his meaning; to which Petrarch replied, that much time must be employed on a work which was to comprise great information in a little space; and that with regard to the dedication, he must labour to merit having his name placed at the head of the work; that it was not sufficient to wear a crown and possess a lofty title, but that he must possess the virtues and perform the great actions which might worthily give him rank among the illustrious men whose characters were described. "Live," continued he, "according to their example, so that your actions may also interest posterity." The Emperor smiled, but looked far from being displeased at the freedom of this exhortation; and Petrarch took the opportunity of presenting him with some medals, among which was one of Augustus, in very excellent preservation. "See," said he, as he presented them, "the great men whose place you occupy. These medals are very dear to me; but you have a right to them. I know the heroes whom

they represent, I know what they have done ; it is not sufficient for you to know them, you must imitate them." He then gave him a short account of their lives, mixing up the details with observations calculated to excite a desire in Charles to follow their example.

In another conversation the Emperor requested Petrarch to give him an account of his life. "He heard me with attention, and if I omitted some circumstances, either through forgetfulness, or a fear of wearying him, he reminded me of them. I was astonished to find him better acquainted than myself with some anecdotes referring to my conduct."

Having accompanied the Imperial cortége about five miles beyond Placentia, Petrarch prepared to return to Milan. The Emperor urgently entreated him to continue the journey to Rome. But Petrarch foresaw that the only object which could interest him in such an expedition, would never be accomplished by a sovereign so weak and vacillating as Charles. His apprehensions were fulfilled. After spending some few months in Italy, without lessening any of the causes of its distresses, he returned to Germany, pursued by the scorn and ridicule of the people who had hailed him as a deliverer.

Petrarch was informed of these occurrences by his friend Lælius. In a letter immediately addressed to the Emperor, he says : "Your departure has the appearance of a flight. Hear what your grandfather and father would have said, had they met you, as you repassed the Alps. 'You have gained much, great Cæsar, by a journey so long expected, and a return so precipitate. You bring with you the crown of iron, the crown of gold, and an empty title. You are styled Emperor of the Romans, though you are truly only King of Bohemia:—would to Heaven you were not even that! If

your ambition were restrained within the narrowest bounds, you would make, perhaps, some attempt at raising yourself—your wants would excite you to recover your patrimony.’ Lælius has brought me your adieus;—they have been to me like the stroke of a dagger. He has brought me, as a present from you, an antique: the image of Cæsar is stamped upon it. If this medal could have spoken, would it not have exhorted you not to make this disgraceful retreat? Farewell, Cæsar! compare that which you are quitting with that which you seek!”

Petrarch, disconcerted in the enterprise so dear to him, continued to reside at Milan, whence he again wrote to the Emperor, accusing him, in the most vehement style, of having deserted a cause which he was especially bound to support. This address, though violent in the extreme, was received by the Emperor with philosophic calmness; and when Petrarch was sent by Galeazzo Visconti to Prague, in the year 1356, he was treated at the Imperial court as an old and valued friend. The object of his mission was to ascertain the intentions of Charles with respect to Milan, which he had threatened to invade; but the ambassador had the satisfaction of returning to his friends with the welcome intelligence that this danger was not to be apprehended. He had but just reached Milan when a diploma arrived, constituting him a Count Palatine. The instrument was enclosed in a box of gold, which he bestowed with a proud liberality on the Chancellor of the Emperor, remaining fully contented with the honour of the title.

About the period when this dignity was conferred upon him, he formed the design of retreating from Milan to some spot in the neighbourhood, where he might enjoy purer air, and live more retired. The sudden death of

Mattheo Visconti had caused a general agitation, and numerous were the rumours soon afloat that Galeazzo was his murderer. This accusation appears to have been without any reasonable foundation. It was certainly not credited by Petrarch; but it is equally certain, that Milan and its court were not so agreeable to him as they had been. It is, however, not improbable that the bare existence of the suspicion may have rendered the society of the city less agreeable to Petrarch than formerly, and that on this account he hastened once more into solitude.

The spot which Petrarch chose for his retreat was the little village of Garignano, on the river Adda, about three miles distant from Milan, and the country around which was lonely and picturesque. In this retirement, which was occasionally exchanged for the still deeper solitudes of a neighbouring monastery, he devoted all his thoughts to religious meditation. In a letter to Guido Settimo * he says : " The tenor of my life is tranquil and uniform, for I am no longer tormented by the passions which held me captive in my youth. But what do I say ? It is the dew of heaven only that has extinguished them ; for how many old men do we not often see sunk, to the great dishonour of humanity, in gross licentiousness ? Like a weary traveller, I redouble my steps as I approach the termination of my journey. I read and write day and night, and my only rest is in sometimes doing the one, and sometimes the other. These are my sole occupations and my sole pleasures. My health is so strong, my body so robust, that neither years, nor serious occupations, nor abstinence, nor scourges, could of themselves have rendered me less subservient to the passions with which I have so long

* Abbé de Sade, *Mémoires*, t. iii. p. 447.

waged war. All my hope is in the assistance of Jesus Christ. With regard to the gifts of fortune, I am equally distant from the two extremes; and indeed enjoy that mediocrity which is so much to be desired. In one thing only can I be an object of envy to others—it is, that I am more esteemed than many would wish me to be, and more so than wholly agrees with my quiet. Not only does the greatest Prince of Italy, with all his court, love and honour me, but his people even respect me much more than I deserve, and love me without either knowing or seeing me—for I rarely go out: the very reason, perhaps, it may be said, why I am so esteemed. I have passed at Milan an olympiad, and begun the last year of a lustrum. The kindness with which I am treated by every one, attaches me so much to Milan that I love the very houses, the air, and the walls, to say nothing of my friends and acquaintances. I live in a very remote corner of the city, towards the west. An ancient devotional custom brings all the people every Sunday to the church of S. Ambrosio, near which I reside. On other days, the neighbourhood is a desert. Many persons whom I know, or who desire to know me, threaten to come and see me; but either detained by their business, or frightened by the distance, they never come. You see how many advantages I derive from fixing myself near this great saint. He consoles me by his presence, obtains for my soul the blessings of Heaven, and saves me from no slight annoyance. When I happen to go out, which very rarely occurs, either to perform my duty to my sovereign, or from any motive of convenience, I salute all to the right hand and to the left, with a simple bend of the head, without speaking to, or approaching any one. Fortune has made no change in my food or sleep; and you know what they

are. I even diminish them a little every day; so that, after a short time, there will hardly remain anything to take away. I never seek my couch but for the purpose of sleeping, unless I be ill. As soon as I am awake, I leap from it, and hasten into my library. This I often do in the middle of the night, especially when the nights are short, and I want to be up. I only yield to Nature just as much as she absolutely demands, and that which cannot be refused her. Food, sleep, and amusement vary according to time and place. I love repose and solitude: thus to my friends I appear churlish, because I see them so rarely; but, when I do join them, I compensate for the silence of a year by the conversation of a day. For the present, I have taken an exceedingly pleasant house in the country, near Milan, where the air is most delicious, and where I am now residing. I pass the same life here as elsewhere, except that I am more free, and farther from annoyances than in the city. I want for nothing: the country people bring me plenty of fruit, fish, ducks, and vegetables of every kind. At a short distance there is a Carthusian monastery, only lately built, where I can find, every hour of the day, the consolations afforded by devotion. I desired to take up my lodging, as it were, in the cloister, and the good brothers consented, and even wished me to do so: but I have thought it better to fix myself at a short distance, though near enough to be able to bear part in their holy exercises. Their gate is always open to me—a privilege granted to very few. You, perhaps, wish to be informed of my fortune; and, if you doubt the reports you have heard respecting my riches, you shall now be told the truth. My income, I confess, is increased, but my expenses are increased also. You know me—I have never been either poorer or richer. Wealth, when it

multiplies wants and desires, only produces poverty. I have, however, as yet, experienced the contrary of this. The more I have had, the less have I desired,—abundance has rendered me more tranquil and more moderate in my desires. I am not, however, certain what effect the possession of great wealth would have on my mind: it might produce, perhaps, the same consequences with me as with others.”

While at Garignano, he wrote his book “*De Remediis utriusque Fortunæ*,” for the consolation of his old friend Azzo da Correggio, to whom he dedicated it, as a mark of friendship, constant and enduring through all the vicissitudes of time and fortune. But an accident happened to him about this period which kept him for some time from his usual pursuits. A large manuscript of “*Cicero’s Epistles*,” which he had copied with his own hand, was the constant companion of his leisure. By some carelessness, in passing the stand that supported the volume, which, being bound strongly in wood, was of considerable weight, he let it fall, more than once, on his left leg; the bruise thus occasioned ulcerated, and his medical attendants had begun to determine on the amputation of the limb, when the inflammation ceased, and a cure was effected.

The first use which he made of his liberty, on recovering from this accident, was to visit Bergamo, on the invitation of a personage whose name has been immortalised by the circumstance.* Henry Capra was a rich and noted watch-maker, possessing by nature a lively and penetrating mind, which he had diligently cultivated; but having begun his studies too late in life, he was more enthusiastical and fanciful than might have been ex-

* Tiraboschi, t. v. lib. i. p. 43.

pected from his age or character. His greatest ambition was to know and be known to Petrarch, and he employed every means which this ambition could suggest to effect his purpose: the poet became acquainted with his wish, and good-naturedly said, "He shall have his desire gratified; it would be barbarous to refuse him that which will make him so happy, and cost me so little." Nothing could exceed the delight with which he received the intimation of Petrarch that he was willing to accept his acquaintance. He immediately employed persons to copy all the works of his illustrious friend; placed his arms and portrait in every part of his house, and at last gave up his business, notwithstanding the advice of Petrarch, that he might devote himself entirely to letters. But he had not yet received a visit from the object of his veneration — this was all that he wanted to make his happiness complete. "Let him but honour my house with his presence for only one day," said he, "and I shall be happy and glorious through all ages." Some years, however, it seems, passed away before the much-desired visit was paid. At length the happy day arrived which was to crown him with fame, and on the eighteenth of October, 1358, Petrarch proceeded to Bergamo. The governor and several of the chief inhabitants came out to meet him, and offer him a lodging in the palace. Poor Capra was in great distress while these invitations were being given. He had accompanied his friend from the commencement of the journey, and to secure him, had associated with himself some men of literature whose conversation might render the way less tedious. His anxiety was at last removed by Petrarch's declaring that he was the guest of Henry Capra solely, and that he would lodge nowhere but in his house! His reception there bore witness both to

the wealth and the enthusiasm of his host. The furniture of the chamber in which he slept was all purple, and the bed superbly gilt, Capra declaring that no one had ever yet slept in it, or ever should again, except Petrarch. The next day our poet took his leave, but the watch-maker accompanied him a long way on the road, and was at last torn from him by violence, his friends fearing that the joy he had experienced would either make him ill or mad. Some time before this, a poor, blind, old grammarian had walked over the best part of Italy to express the same feeling as Capra.*

Petrarch shortly after made a journey to Padua and Venice, but in 1359 was again at Milan, where he was visited by Boccaccio, who passed with him several days to the great pleasure of both. Among the many topics on which these two celebrated men conversed during this meeting, religion appears to have been the chief. The author of the "Decameron" had unhappily^a been till that period as licentious in his conduct as in his productions. Impressions were made upon him by Petrarch's earnest and faithful counsels, which influenced the whole of his future life. Before they parted, the poet bestowed on him a copy of some of his works, among which were his Latin Eclogues, and it was in return for this present that Boccaccio sent him the copy of Dante, which he accompanied with so many praises of that poet, that he was led to fear he had excited his jealousy. Petrarch thus vindicates himself from the suspicion in an answer to Boccaccio's letter.

"The praises which you give him are just and well deserved, worthy both of you and him, and infinitely more flattering than those applauses with which the

* Sen., lib. xvi. ep. vii.

populace disturb his manes. I applaud your verses, and join you in your praises of this great poet—common in his style, but very noble in his thoughts. One thing only displeases me in your letter; it is to see that you know me so little. What! can I help being charmed with the praises of illustrious men? Nothing is farther from me! Of all vices, envy is the last I could be guilty of. I call heaven to witness, I am continually rendered miserable at seeing low mechanics even enjoying the advantages and respect which are denied to men of genius. Gladly do I seize this opportunity of confuting the charge made against me by my enemies of hating this great poet. Why should I hate him? I never saw him but once, or rather he was shown to me, and that in my childhood. He lived with my father and grandfather, older than the former, younger than the latter, and the same storm drove them all the same day from their country. This similarity of fortune, joined to a union of tastes, united him in strict friendship with my father; but they took opposite courses: my father yielded to circumstances, and occupied himself with the care of his family; Dante, on the contrary, resisted them, and resolutely followed the path he had taken, thinking only of glory, and resigning everything for it. Neither the injustice of his countrymen, nor private quarrels, nor exile, nor poverty, nor love of children or wife,—nothing could distract him from his studies, though poetry demands so much quiet and repose. I cannot too much admire him on this account. I see many reasons to love him, none to hate him, and yet fewer to despise him. Both his spirit and his style place him beyond the reach of any such feeling.” He then explains the reason of his not having the works of this celebrated poet among his other books. One was, that he had principally occu-

himself in searching for copies of ancient and rare works, and had thus neglected to procure those which he could obtain at any time without difficulty. Another was, that writing in Italian only, at the commencement of his literary career, he was fearful that should he study the productions of his great countryman, he might be led imperceptibly to imitate him. "There might be," says he, "too much presumption in the thought, but I wished to raise myself on my own wings, and without the support of others; to have a style and manner wholly my own; to be, in fact, original. Whether I have succeeded in this aim I must leave others to decide. No one can accuse me of being a plagiarist: if anything should be found in my writings which resembles what has been said by another author, the resemblance is wholly casual. I have always avoided being a plagiarist or imitator. If shame or modesty had not made me do this, a certain degree of youthful pride would. But cured now, as I am, of the fear of being a copyist, I read anything that comes in my way, and especially Dante, to whom I give the palm of vulgar eloquence." With regard to his ceasing to write ordinarily in the common language, he says: "I feared the fate which I see attending others who have written in Italian, and Dante more particularly, whose poems I have heard so marred in the lowest places of public resort; and I had no reason to hope that I could render my verses more flexible, or of easier pronunciation. The event has proved that I was right: the poems I wrote when young are spread among the people, who repeat and disfigure them; that which I once desired, therefore, that is, to have my productions in everybody's mouth, disgusts me now. It is horrible to hear one's verses marred in the repetition. Those who envy me wish to prove that I am envious of

this poet. I have many times asserted that I envy no one ; but I am not to be believed on my word. Let us examine, then, the truth. How could I envy a man who passed all his life in producing works which formed the delight of my early youth ; a man who made that his principal, his sole occupation, perhaps, which has only been for me an amusement, a gentle exercise of the mind ? Tell me, I pray you, where was there any matter for envy ?”

In 1360 Petrarch was sent to Paris, as the representative of Galeazzo, to congratulate King John, taken prisoner at Poitiers, on his return from captivity. Having fulfilled the duties of this embassy, he hoped to enjoy some repose at Milan. But the plague and the alarms of civil war united to drive him from his home. He hastened to Padua ; but here too the plague was now raging. Venice was the only place which, at this time, offered a safe retreat. Thither, accordingly, he bent his steps, carrying with him his library, a large collection, that is, of manuscripts, and which he so prized that nothing, it is said, could induce him to take a journey without them. His increasing years, and the agitated state of the country, began to make him anxious as to the future disposal of this treasure. At first he thought of bestowing it upon some monastery, but he had not been long in Venice when he proposed to offer it, in the way of a bequest, to the republic. The offer was very graciously accepted ; and by a decree of the state, the palace of the Two Towers, afterwards converted into the monastery of St. Sepulchre, was devoted to the reception of the poet and his library. Generations have passed since all traces of this invaluable deposit ceased to exist.

At Venice, Petrarch received another visit from

Boccaccio, driven from Florence by the plague, and bringing with him, to Petrarch's great delight, the learned Greek, Leontio Pilato, one of the most singular as well as erudite men of the age. Boccaccio describes his naturally hideous countenance as rendered still more frightful by a long beard, and a huge mass of black uncombed hair. His manners accorded with his looks; but both his appearance and manners were regarded with complacency by the scholars, who could appreciate his vast stores of knowledge on every subject connected with the literature of Greece. By Boccaccio's interest, he obtained a professorship at Florence, where he lectured for more than two years on Homer, and produced a translation of the "Iliad," and part of the "Odyssey," into Latin.

In October, 1367, Petrarch received the joyful intelligence that Urban V. had removed his court to Rome, and publicly proclaimed his determination to reform the Church. This pious resolve was unhappily defeated by political troubles. Petrarch's hopes vanished as rapidly as they had been suddenly excited. Urban summoned him to Rome. He obeyed the call; but, conscious of the rapid decline of his strength, carefully arranged his affairs, as if he might never return. His apprehensions seemed about to be realised, for, just as he had reached Ferrara, he fell down in a swoon, which lasted for more than thirty hours. In this state of insensibility, he was tenderly watched by the princes of Este. Anxious, as soon as consciousness returned, to continue his journey, he again set forward. But the effort was made in vain: his strength utterly failed him, and he was conveyed to Padua in a litter.

This warning convinced him that, whatever the number

of his days, they could only be usefully employed in complete retirement. The village of Arquà, four leagues distant from Padua, and situated on a gentle declivity, among the Euganean hills, had already attracted his attention by the soft beauty of the surrounding scenery. Here, therefore, he erected a small but pleasant and convenient house, settled his daughter and her husband with him, and, as soon as his health was a little recovered, comforted himself by the quiet renewal of his literary labours. His immediate object was the conclusion of a treatise entitled "*De Ignorantia sui ipsius, et Multorum*," begun three years before, and principally intended to confute the bigoted disciples of Aristotle and Averroes, who abounded in Venice, and had dared to tell him, in the course of a public dispute, that "he was a very good man, but no scholar."

His tranquil employments at Arquà were suddenly interrupted by the commencement of hostilities between Padua and Venice. The open country was laid waste, and he was obliged to seek shelter in the capital. He had scarcely arrived there, when the enemy appeared at its gates. A singular instance was now given of the confidence placed in his character. Venice, it was believed, would deny nothing to his intercession. Yielding to the appeals with which he was on all sides beset, he suffered himself to be again invested with the office of ambassador. An audience was granted him the day after his arrival in Venice. But his strength or his resolution failed. He hesitated, and stopped in the midst of his address. The assembly broke up, but was convened for the following day. He had recovered his powers, and the brilliancy of his eloquence shone forth with all its early splendour. The Venetians listened to

him with delight, and he returned to Padua with a treaty of peace.*

Thankful to find himself again in his home at Arquà, he diligently resumed the labours which still formed the chief pleasure of his existence. But his last energies had been expended at Venice. A slow fever preyed upon him, and he permitted it to take its course without resistance. He would neither moderate his studies, nor change his poor diet, or take the medicines prescribed by his physicians. In this feeble state he read, for the first time, the "Decameron" of his friend Boccaccio. The story of Griselda greatly amused him; and he wrote to Boccaccio, expressing his general admiration of the work; praising the elegance of the style, and endeavouring to excuse the freedom of the pictures by lamenting the manners of the age. The day after writing this letter, July 18th, 1374, he had retired to his library, seeking the usual relief to his languor in study and meditation. One of his servants, on entering the room soon after, was struck with his singular appearance of serenity. Seated in his chair, his head resting on a book, he had tranquilly breathed his last.

Petrarch was equally subject with other men to the common vices of our nature. He had, in addition to them, the faults which are more peculiar to the strong and acute susceptibilities of genius. We know him, and so it is with most men whose memories are precious to the world, as well as if he had lived among us. He concealed nothing. His follies, and they were many, were committed openly. He had never a thought, which interested him, but he supposed it his duty to tell it. Till forty years of age, he only spoke of his religious

* Script. Rerum Ital., t. xix. p. 751.

convictions as filling him with shame, honestly showing how much he knew and how little he did. After that period, a great change took place in his disposition, and all that he wrote and said was only uttered to express a truth of which he felt the power. Placed in situations which continually appealed to his pride and ambition, he preserved from youth to age his liberty of action and his freedom of speech equally uncontrolled. The offer of the highest places in the pontifical government, the choice of canonries and bishoprics, weighed light as feathers against his love of truth, his patriotism, and self-respect. Popes, cardinals, bishops, and kings, were literally nothing in his eyes, but as they might become agents in the work of making mankind wiser and happier. The consciousness of knowledge and truth, taught him to speak to such men as their master; and, while in admiring the unaccountable sweetness of his sonnets we smile at their frequent fatuities, there are very few portions of his prose writings which do not excite in us admiration of his wisdom, and a corresponding reverence for his virtues. The reader of his poems should have an acute ear, a very delicate apprehension of metaphors, of mystical allusions, and of the entire range of imaginative sentiment. To read his Epistles, Dialogues, and Treatises with satisfaction, the main qualification required is the love of wisdom.

BOCCACCIO.



BOCCACCIO di Chellino di Buonaiuto was a wealthy merchant of Florence. He had already, while still a young man, filled several offices in the republic. But he was restless, adventurous, and fond of pleasure. During a visit to Paris, his command of money and his personal accomplishments introduced him to a wide circle of acquaintances. He became enamoured of a lady whose station is described as below nobility, but above the middle rank. His affection was returned. The unfortunate lady gave birth to a son, and died immediately afterwards, leaving no record of her name or history.

This event took place in 1313. The disconsolate Boccaccio returned to Florence, bearing with him the infant Giovanni. Only a few years were required to inspire the father with hopes of his child's future eminence. He had scarcely reached the age of seven, when he began to pour forth unpremeditated verses ; while the sweetness and docility of his temper made him more an object of love than of wonder. But with all the fondness and vanity which the precocious genius of Giovanni excited, there was too much of a merchant's prudence in the father to let him grow up with no better guide to fortune. As soon, therefore, as he had gained

the elements of classical knowledge, under the famous master, Giovanni da Strada, he placed him with an accountant, and shortly after apprenticed him to a merchant.* Six years were spent in this apprenticeship; but so little did young Boccaccio advance in the knowledge of business, that his master having tried his ability in a commission to Naples and Paris, sent him home to his father, observing that he had not sufficient capacity for his calling.

Nothing could have made the father of such a youth doubt his ability. Annoyed by his correspondent's message, he resolved on proving to him that though his son was unskilful in the petty details of the counting-house, he had a mind capable of much nobler employments. Giovanni was therefore placed in the office of an eminent civilian. Month after month, his father made anxious inquiry respecting his progress. The old lawyers smiled at his vanity. Giovanni had soon grown tired of law-books; and one of the professors maliciously whispered that he spent more time in making rhymes than in studying decretals. This was lamentable news. The unhappy father came immediately to the conclusion, that his son would be better off in the world as only a tolerably respectable merchant, than he could possibly be as a bad lawyer, or a good poet. Whatever shrewdness he showed in this determination, there was little in his next proceeding. Instead of sending his recreant son to Holland, or to some other province of sober trade, he fixed him at Naples, calculating only what profits might be made there, even by Giovanni's moderate abilities and prudence.

But scarcely had Giovanni found his lodgings and

* Manetti, *Lib. de Civib. Famos.*, p. 89.

opened his ledgers, when he rushed to the tomb of Virgil, and casting himself at its foot, called the poet to hear his vows as an ever faithful disciple.* His enthusiasm and talents soon made him known to a large circle of eminent men. The generous patronage of King Robert had rendered Naples the favourite seat of poetry and philosophy. Boccaccio took no humble view of his own genius. He felt himself capable of great things, if once put upon the right course. Instead, therefore, of speculating in trade, he resolved upon a grand speculation in the use of his abilities. Giving himself up to study, he entered upon the highest courses of philosophy; penetrated the mysteries of astrology, then a favourite and legitimate pursuit with learned men, and commenced reading the ancient fathers of theology.

In these efforts to prepare himself for future eminence, he was further stimulated by the arrival of Petrarch. Having heard his examination by King Robert, and the noble oration which he delivered in praise of poetry, the living and present Petrarch was far too powerful a rival for the shade of Virgil. Boccaccio confessed that he could do no otherwise than transfer his allegiance from the latter to the former.

But it was not among scholars and poets only that he passed his time. He possessed many accomplishments; was handsome in person, and graceful in his manners. The most courtly circles in Naples were speedily open to him. He became a universal favourite; and was singled out from a crowd of other admirers for the especial notice of the reigning beauty of the day, a natural daughter of King Robert. This lady, known as the princess Mary, inspired him with a passion which

* Filippo Villani, *Le Vite*, p. 16.; Mazzuchelli, *Annot.* 68.

long blinded him to all the nobler claims upon his genius. At her instigation he wrote his first romances and poems, works which would scarcely have survived to a distant age, but for the celebrity of his maturer productions.

A letter from his father, infirm in health, and solitary, recalled him to Florence. He left with a heavy heart scenes and employments so flattering to his vanity. Bitter reproaches awaited him. His father's temper had become soured by years and disappointment. Thus he could find neither comfort nor amusement at home ; and abroad he was met only by stern and busy men, men whose minds habitually subjected every taste and pursuit to some great conflict of politics. No two cities could, just at that time, have presented a stronger contrast than Naples and Florence ; nor, till a later period of his life, could anything have been more hateful to Boccaccio than either the business or the broils of his fellow-citizens.

From the vexations which he had thus to endure, he had no other relief than that afforded by his generous and affectionate nature, prompting him to do all in his power to render his father less gloomy and discontented. He received unexpected assistance in this effort. His father fell in love with the handsome and amiable Bice dei Bosticchi, and soon after married her. Boccaccio found himself relieved by this event from any further restrictions on his liberty. Hastening back to Naples, he was speedily reinvested with all his former popularity. But great changes had occurred during his absence. By the death of King Robert, the crown was left to his grand-daughter, a young, inexperienced girl, and the government to a regency which perpetrated and tolerated the grossest crimes. Boccaccio viewed these things

with unconcern. His thoughts were shared between poetry and the princess Mary.

To this period are ascribed his "Filostrato," in ottava rima, and the "Amorosa Visione," both written in obedience to the wishes of the princess. But the year 1348 suppressed, for a time, all thoughts of a lighter kind. It was a year of horror and lamentation. The pestilence which had long been desolating Syria and Egypt was now brooding over the western shores of the Mediterranean, and before the end of summer, Italy saw its fairest cities converted into abodes of death. Nothing, at first, could turn men's attention from this terrific scourge. The plague is there! the plague is here! might be taken as the substance of all that could be then either thought or said. But a few still retained some degree of reflection. These felt that their safety mainly depended upon freeing themselves from the intolerable weight of gloom daily increasing upon their spirits. Very different means were employed for this purpose by different men. Some plunged into a vortex of brutal licentiousness, and changed melancholy for madness. Others happily took the opposite course, and gained peace and fortitude by raising their minds above the world itself to the regions of perpetual life. A third class, shrinking from the loathsome vices of the former, but unsympathising with the piety of the latter, sought relief in such refined pleasures as were opened to them by the possession of taste and wealth.

From this class Boccaccio selected the imaginary personages to whom the praise is given of being the pleasantest and most ingenious story-tellers that Italy, or any other country, had as yet heard. It was when the plague had made itself known by all its worst terrors, that, one Thursday morning, the bells of Santa Maria

Novella seemed to chime in vain, no one entering the church to take part in the appointed service. They had ceased some minutes when first one, and then another lady walked up the aisle. They were followed, at some interval, by five others, all of them, from the first to the last, clad in deep mourning. The oldest was not more than seven and twenty, the youngest was about eighteen. When the customary office had been performed, in the almost empty church, by pale and haggard priests, the young ladies drew together, and exchanged their melancholy salutations. They were all connected either by neighbourhood or relationship. Another prayer rose in unison from their lips. After mutual inquiries, one among them proposed, that, as they could be neither useful nor safe in Florence, they should retreat, without delay, into the country. An objection was made, that they would be without guide or protector.* Just at that moment, there appeared three gentlemen, well known to all the ladies, and by some of them recognised as suitors. The subject already stated was now seriously discussed. More than one of the party had a choice of villas in the neighbourhood. The necessary plans were soon arranged. Money, servants, provisions, existed in abundance, and by sunrise the next morning, the whole party was quietly proceeding along the road to Fiesole. About five miles from the city, they arrived at the foot of a green, thickly wooded hill. Half way up the ascent stood a small castle, surrounded on all sides by leafy shades, by orchards and gardens in richest bloom. There the ten pilgrims resolved to take up their present abode.

* The young lady thus describes the helplessness of her sex :
“ *Noi siamo mobili, ritrose, sospettose, pusillanime, et paurose.*”—Dec.
Introduz.

A queen was chosen, and at her wise command, each of the party was to furnish, in turn, a tale or narrative for general amusement. Two days were passed very happily at this first residence. On the third, it was deemed expedient to shun the possible intrusion of visitors by removing to a villa somewhat farther distant. This exquisite abode, a palace rather than a villa, was furnished with all the luxuries which wealth and art could supply. Its gardens were filled with the choicest flowers. White and red roses, mingling their delicate tints with a profusion of jasmine, bordered the paths. Surrounded on all sides by ancient cedars, by orange trees laden with blossoms and fruit, and by shrubs of every kind, was a small meadow, the short smooth grass of which was of the darkest green. Here and there rich patches of flowers decorated the sward, and in the midst was a fountain of the purest white marble, covered with exquisite sculptures, and giving from its copious jets perpetual freshness to the air.*

It was in this beautiful meadow that the company delighted to assemble, and listen sometimes to music and singing, but more frequently to the charming narratives which they had such a happy power of reciting. So, at least, Boccaccio tells us; and there have not been wanting commentators who would venture upon the task of endeavouring to prove that the personages and the places spoken of were equally real. The latter, indeed, are generally supposed to be identical with the Poggio Gherardi and the Villa Palmieri. Near the former, Boccaccio himself possessed a small residence, and he loved to speak of the verdant hills, and valleys, and brooks which charmed him in his solitary rambles. The

* Dec., Giornata Terza.

Villa Palmieri, long after the age when he wrote, preserved the main features of his description. Its groves and gardens had the same fresh beauty; and it was not difficult, with Boccaccio for a guide, to trace the secluded path which led to *la Valle delle donne*, and thence to follow the brawling Affrico, growing tranquil as it finds its way through the grounds of a neighbouring monastery.

But no such marks of reality exist to identify the story-tellers themselves with any living persons. It is well that this is the case. Grievously offensive to good taste and morality are many portions of the "Decameron," but the groundwork of the whole would be far more painfully repulsive were we to believe, that seven of the most accomplished young women of Florence did actually tolerate all that was told in these ten-day novels. Boccaccio himself bitterly lamented, in after years*, the licence with which he had cast the rubbish of worldly baseness and slander upon his own bright mirror of human nature. In the following century, the long-felt injury which he had inflicted on public morals, and domestic respectability, was avenged by a remarkable outbreak of fanatical justice. Headed by Savonarola, a procession of priests and monks, and a multitude of the citizens of Florence, entered the Piazza de' Signori on the last day of the Carnival, 1497. They bore with them all the copies that could be collected of Boccaccio's "Decameron," and, grievous to be said, of Dante's and Petrarch's minor poems. A huge fire was kindled in the middle of the square; and, after a few words of stern discourse, the

* "Ma non potè, come desiderava, la parola, già detta, al petto rivotare, nè il foco che col mantice avea acceso colla sua volontà spegnere."—FILIPPO VILLANI, p. 18.

whole of the original copies of all those works were committed to the flames.*

It was to relieve himself, and those around him, if tradition speak true, from the terrors of that dreadful year, 1348, that Boccaccio began to write his famous stories. The plague pursued its steady and irresistible march. Boccaccio was not in Florence itself, but he knew all the outs and ins of those narrow streets, and every gate of those huge iron-windowed palaces, through which the pestilence had entered to seize its victims. Naples had, at this juncture, to encounter another species of danger. The king of Hungary had laid waste the country with an invading army, and was advancing towards the capital. Giovanna fled precipitately into France, and would have permanently lost her throne, had not Acciajuolo, one of our author's earliest patrons at Naples, remained firm to her cause. But interested as Boccaccio had become in all that affected the society in which he moved, his attention was now called to duties of a more pressing kind. News arrived that his father had lately died; that the death of his mother-in-law had occurred shortly before this event; and that a little orphan brother was thus left entirely dependent upon his care. He had long known that his father anxiously desired his return to Florence. The dying man had expressed the wish with his latest breath. It was impossible to resist such an appeal; and tearing himself again from all the fascinations of Naples, Boccaccio took up his

* Baldelli, *Vita Illus.*, iii. p. 286. The "Decameron" was early placed on the list of prohibited books. At the earnest entreaty of the Florentine government, the Pope was induced to appoint a commission to examine the work, and prepare it, with proper corrections, for the press. An edition published in 1573 bears this on the title-page: "*Ricorretto in Roma, et emendato secondo l'ordine del Sacro Conc. di Trento.*"

abode in Florence, with the determination to become a true and worthy citizen.

He fulfilled his promise both to himself and others. Florence was suffering at the time from all the evils created by moral and political disorganisation. The licentiousness which the plague had nursed to maturity was now producing its full harvest of vice. As yet unhumbled by misfortune, the nobles and wealthier classes revelled in luxury ; while the lower orders, oppressed by taxes they were unable to pay, freed themselves by the commission of every species of violence and crime. Boccaccio shuddered at the spectacle thus presented to his view. But he was strengthened in his resolution to labour in the task of public improvement by a visit from Petrarch. This, combined with other circumstances, tended to produce a very important change in his character and pursuits. Happily, his abilities and power of usefulness were quickly recognised by his fellow-citizens. He was appointed envoy to the court of Brandenburg ; and, as a still higher honour, to that of Pope Innocent the Sixth at Avignon.

These public employments were not allowed to interrupt the pursuits of literature.* He was well conversant with the Latin classics ; and his study of Greek, under the monk Barlaam and Leontio Pilato, had given him sufficient knowledge of that language to make him anxious for its cultivation among his countrymen. A laborious and expensive search for manuscripts entered into the plans of all his journeys. On one occasion,

* Numerous manuscripts were minutely and beautifully copied by his own hand. Whenever he could not afford to purchase an author, this was his labour. "It is a wonder," says one of his old biographers, "to look at them, especially as the work of a very fat man, *'ut ejus corporis habitudo fuit.'*"—MANETTI, p. 20. The copy of Dante which he gave to Petrarch was exquisitely written by him.

he visited the monastery of Monte Casino. His first inquiry respected the library. He was told to mount a ladder, and that the books would be found in the loft above. To this loft there was neither door, nor window. The manuscripts, worth more than gold and precious stones, had long ceased to have any value in the eyes of the ignorant monks. Most of them were moth-eaten, and covered with mould. Of others, large portions were missing; and when Boccaccio asked what had become of the lost sheets, he learnt that whenever the good fathers were in want of money, they took some of the manuscripts, and, having contrived to obliterate the profane classic, copied in its place a pious legend, or portion of the ritual, which found a ready purchaser among the women or children of the neighbourhood.

In the course of the year 1359 he made a journey to Milan, for the purpose of spending some days alone with Petrarch. He had not seen him since his embassy to Padua, when he was commissioned to offer him the presidentship of the Florentine University. The original impression made upon his mind by the conversation of this now wise and good man, was rendered far deeper and more permanent by their present interview.

From this period, Boccaccio became every day more distinguished by the gravity of his conversation and deportment. But it was not till the year 1362 that the change took place which wholly separated his affections from the world, and fixed them on a higher state. It happened one day, that while engaged at home in earnest study, he was told that a stranger stood at the door, saying he was the bearer of a message which he could only communicate to Messer Boccaccio in private. The stranger was a monk from the Carthusian monastery of

Sienna. On being admitted he stated that the venerable Father Petroni, beloved of all the brotherhood, and revered for his wonderful gifts of illumination, had died the preceding week. Shortly before he expired, he charged the monk, who was now present, to visit Boccaccio, and communicate to him the warning which, he wished it to be known, was uttered prophetically with his last breath. The Carthusian then lifting up his hand, and fixing his stern eyes on the awe-stricken poet, exhorted him, in the name of the saintly Petroni, to repent of his manifold sins and follies ; to embrace a life of devotion, and employ his talents, during the time he might yet be spared, in the service of God. Should this warning be neglected, he would miserably perish !

Having delivered his message, the monk instantly disappeared, and Boccaccio was left alone wondering, like a man waking from a dream, or conscious that a vision has just passed before him. As soon as his agitation would permit, he wrote to Petrarch. His letter described minutely the visit of the monk, and his own change of conduct. He had resolved to write no more verses or tales, and even to sell all his books of profane learning. Petrarch's reply to this letter abounds in wise and useful suggestions. He doubted the monk's authority to speak with so prophetic a voice : "when this messenger," he added, "of Father Pietro Petroni visits me, after fulfilling his other missions, I shall be able to determine what degree of faith is due to his words. The age of the man, his countenance, his eyes, his manners, attitude, and movements, his walk and mode of sitting, his discourse and apparent intention, will all serve to assist me in coming to a right decision." Then warning him against selling his books, he begs that, at

all events, they may not be dispersed ; and offers, to prevent so sad a sacrifice, to purchase them himself.

Notwithstanding the change in his views and habits of living, Boccaccio was allured by an invitation from Niccolò Acciajuoli, now seneschal of the kingdom, to revisit Naples.* He expected to find hospitable entertainment for himself and his brother in the palace of this distinguished patron. To his indignation, the only apartment allowed them was one little ill-furnished chamber, in the remotest quarter of the edifice ; and when they were summoned to dinner, it was by none of the gorgeously liveried attendants on the seneschal, but by a cook fresh from the kitchen, and at whose orders they were obliged to take their place among the commonest menials of the household. Indignant at such treatment, Boccaccio sought instant refuge in the hospitable house of his friend, Mainardo de' Cavalcanti. Some apology was made by the seneschal. He pleaded ignorance of the affront put upon Boccaccio, and entreated him to return. The apology was accepted ; but so little improvement appeared in his accommodation on the second visit, that he again left in disgust, and travelled with all speed to Venice. There he was greeted by Petrarch, and the happiness which he enjoyed under the same roof with this truest of his friends, afforded him fresh proof of the immeasurable superiority of a great and good mind to all worldly dignity.

It would be unaccountably strange to find Boccaccio resisting the persuasions of Petrarch to remain permanently with him, did we not know that there are some men to whom the slightest sacrifice of personal liberty, or even the conceit that it is sacrificed, would be too

* Vita Baldelli, lib. ii. p. 140.

great a price for any earthly privilege whatsoever. The plague was just now raging in Tuscany. Boccaccio had no excess of moral courage, but he would satisfy his free-will at any risk ; and thus, notwithstanding the affectionate entreaties of Petrarch, he journeyed back to Florence. The value of his presence, at this juncture, was readily acknowledged by his fellow-citizens. They were suffering not only from the terrors of the pestilence, but from political embarrassments. Boccaccio was always prepared for any labour of piety and usefulness. After performing some arduous duties connected with the magistracy, he accepted the office of envoy to the papal court, now fixed at Rome.* His reception was honourable to the character of Urban V. and the chiefs of his government. The Bishop of Florence bore especial testimony to the present worth and religious character of Boccaccio; and he returned well satisfied with his successful negotiation.

This journey to Rome was followed by another to Venice, where he hoped again to see Petrarch. But he had shortly before left for Padua. His daughter and her husband, however, received so beloved a friend with the warmest regard. Boccaccio never ceased to speak of their amiable character, and of the charm of their domestic life. But he had an increasing burden of religious anxieties upon him. It was to lighten this by pious conversation that he had sought Petrarch. Not obtaining the comfort thus looked for, he recollected the earnest invitation sent him shortly before by Niccolò di Montefalcone, abbot of the celebrated Certosa di S. Stefano in Calabria. The wealthy abbot, once his fellow-student, had heard reports of his increasing celebrity.

* Tiraboschi, t. v. lib. iii. p. 559.

Moved by these accounts, he wrote him a letter full of affectionate expressions, and telling him that if he would visit the Certosa di S. Stefano, he would find a home to his heart's content. But shortly after writing this letter, he appears to have learnt that Boccaccio was poor, independent in his speech, unpopular with the seneschal of Naples, and, perhaps, more pious than agreeable. All this was well calculated to produce a change in the abbot's mind. But Boccaccio having no suspicion of such an occurrence, pursued his solitary journey into Calabria, and arrived in the middle of the night, sick and weary, at the gate of the monastery. Unhappy traveller! On announcing his name, he was informed that the abbot had set out on a journey that very evening. A neighbouring house afforded the indignant poet sufficient repose to enable him to leave the neighbourhood without waiting the abbot's assistance.

Florence was still agitated by troubles, which Boccaccio had no longer spirit to encounter. There is something like mystery about the invitations which he received from princes, and other distinguished persons. It is no less remarkable to find a man who complained both of poverty and ill-health, so continually travelling, purchasing books, and entertaining scholars in his own house.* Scarcely had he returned to Florence, when an invitation from Mainardo de' Cavalcanti carried him again to Naples. There the queen warmly entreated her courtiers to induce him to take up his abode in her capital. Perhaps her very earnestness frightened him. A brief stay was sufficient to convince him that solitude and repose were now his best resource. On

* Both Villani and Manetti say that Boccaccio was very poor. The Count Mazzuchelli questions this statement (*Annotaz.*, xlii.).

returning to Florence, he hastened on to his humble possession at Certaldo, dear to him as the ancient residence of his forefathers, and no less so for the charm of its soft hills, its tranquil valleys, and limpid streams. There he would have been happy, but a severe sickness seized him shortly after his return, and his sudden recovery was equally a surprise to himself and others.

The concluding passages of his active life were equally honourable and consolatory. He had laboured successfully in promoting the most useful kind of learning among his fellow-citizens. At the expense of all domestic comfort, a sacrifice which Petrarch himself could not endure, he had lodged and boarded, for three years, in his own house, the fierce-tempered, hideous-looking Leontio Pilato.* This learned Calabrian was a terror to both friends and enemies. But he could teach Greek, and Boccaccio had resolved that a school for Greek should be opened at Florence. His patience and liberality were rewarded by the success of his scheme, and by the gratitude of future ages. So greatly did the esteem in which he was held increase with his declining years, that his fellow-citizens gladly availed themselves of any means by which they might show him honour. One grand opportunity still remained to prove their desire to meet his views. Dante's name had been dear to him from childhood, and, unlike Petrarch, he had ardently studied, and learnt to enjoy his works. The Florentines knew his wish to hear the sentence annulled which inflicted such injustice on the poet and his family. Not only was this done, but a decree was passed, by which a professorship was instituted for the public ex-

* Geneal. Deor., lib. xv. c. vi.; De Sade, t. iii. p. 625; Baldelli, Illustraz., t. i. c. xxxiv.

position of the *Commedia*. No one could be found better fitted for this new office than Boccaccio himself. To him, therefore, it was given, with an income of a hundred florins. In his religious fervour, he had assumed the religious habit, and thus qualified, by the gravity of his character and appearance, as well as by his learning, he commenced his lectures in the church of S. Stefano, and continued them from October, 1373, to a short period before his death.

He now enjoyed the quiet for which he had long sighed. His time was passed between Florence and Certaldo, and his thoughts between the composition of his lectures and the Latin treatises by which he vainly hoped to add to his renown as well as usefulness. But this season of tranquil labour drew speedily to its close. The death of Petrarch affected him with profound melancholy. He regarded it as only preliminary to his own. The decline of his strength became more and more visible. It took him three days to write an ordinary letter, and he would now have ceased from all further labour, had not Petrarch's son-in-law earnestly entreated him to superintend the revisal of some works of the poet, not yet made public. The "*Africa*," once so precious in Petrarch's own eyes, was thus issued under his inspection; and other manuscripts were saved which, but for his interference, would have been committed to the flames.

He was happy in having been spared to perform this duty to the memory of his friend. It was the last of his efforts connected with any earthly care. Death came calmly upon him. He felt the inestimable value of the change gradually wrought in his mind since his intercourse with Petrarch. The world had been overcome before he was compelled by weakness to shrink from any

duty which his capacity enabled him to fulfil. He had laboured to the end in his particular calling with honourable and conscientious zeal. The injury inflicted on the pure and noble spirit of literature by his early licentiousness, he could not absolutely repair; but, had it been in his power, he would gladly have sacrificed all his fame for the privilege of obliterating some pages of his writings. This sense of genuine heart-felt humility was combined with a far clearer recognition of fundamental Christian truths than is usually ascribed to the men of those times. Hence, the dark shadows attendant upon deep self-abasement became a groundwork for the rainbow lights of heavenly hope. Boccaccio retained his reason to the last; and having received the rites of his Church with profound reverence and comfort, he peaceably expired on the 21st of December, 1375. His death took place in his own little villa at Certaldo, and he was buried in the neighbouring church of St. Philip and St. James, with all the public respect due to his genius and character.

LORENZO DE' MEDICI.

"FOR the conceit," says Lord Bacon, "that learning should dispose men to leisure and privateness, and make men slothful, it were a strange thing if that which accustometh the mind to a perpetual motion and agitation should induce slothfulness; whereas, contrariwise, it may be truly affirmed, that no kind of men love business for itself, but those that are learned."* The philosopher gives many examples to illustrate his position; still, well as they are chosen, not one excels the subject of this memoir, as an instance of the union of activity in business with the love of letters:

But Cosmo de' Medici, the grandfather of Lorenzo, was even a greater and wiser man than any of his descendants. He laid the foundation of their power by his far-seeing judgment and honourable enterprise as a merchant; and when he possessed the wealth and the influence which might have made him a prince, he would take no other rank than that of a citizen of a free republic. His taste for the fine arts and love of literature were not inferior to those of his children or grandchildren. They were only kept in subordination to a stricter sense of practical and social duty. Nor was

* Advancement of Learning.

Cosmo de' Medici without the wisdom brought by home and personal sorrows. He had a son upon whom rested his chief hope of the future virtues and prosperity of the family. This son reached the age of forty-seven. His health then rapidly declined, and he died. Cosmo never again looked up with that clear, sage, confident expression of countenance, which long intercourse with the world had given him, and which seemed to say that he was prepared for any kind of difficulty or trial. Other deaths occurred in the family; and, when too feeble to walk, the old man had a sad satisfaction in being carried from one room to another of his palace in Florence, remarking the silence and emptiness of the scarce tenanted apartments.

He was succeeded by his son Piero, a man of very inferior ability and principle. Hardly had he entered upon the management of the world-wide traffic in which Cosmo had been engaged, when he became involved in difficulties threatening the most ruinous losses. To free himself from these embarrassments, he prepared to gather in his capital, and invest it in the purchase of estates. This process was one of extreme difficulty. It ruined many of the persons who had depended upon the extended views and liberality of Cosmo. The power of the Medici was properly that of merchants and capitalists. It shook to its foundations under the new system of Piero; and had Florence not been distracted at the time by factious politics, no sovereign house of Medici would ever have existed.

Strange to say, Piero overcame all his difficulties and enemies; and though, when he died, his two sons, Lorenzo and Giuliano, were under age, and many of the chief men of Florence despised their youth, the name of Medici retained all its tyrannous and fascinating charm,

This might be politically ascribed to the wise counsels of Thomas Soderini, a man of great experience and knowledge; but the personal character of the two young brothers had no small influence with the mass of the citizens. They were distinguished by every kind of accomplishment. Their popular manners, good temper, and generous liberality, constituted them princes in defiance of republicanism. For much, both of their acquirements and virtues, they were indebted to the education given them by their admirable mother. Lucretia Tornabuoni excelled most of the women of her station in domestic prudence, coupled with rich intellectual endowments. She loved literature, and could write elegant verses, but her chief object in cultivating this taste was to improve the minds of her children. Lorenzo, born in 1448, met her wishes with early and affectionate enthusiasm. She encouraged his fervour by placing him under the most distinguished scholars of the age. He became the pupil of Gentile d' Urbino, a learned and devout churchman. From this good man he is said to have imbibed those deep principles of piety which, amid all the distractions of public life, and of pleasure too largely enjoyed, were never undervalued. Cristoforo Landino, Marsilio Ficino, and Argyropolis, men whose names represented all that was eminent in the learning and philosophy of the times, were the preceptors of his more advanced youth. In his sixteenth year, he was sent to visit such of the Italian courts as appeared most likely to support the future policy of Florence. He thus laid the foundation of numerous friendships which contributed both to his happiness and renown.

It was to render him eminent as the chief of the richest and most powerful republic then existing, that Lorenzo was thus carefully educated. But his taste for literature

and the arts kept at least equal pace with his ambition. The earliest of his known compositions is a sonnet. This was addressed to a lady, the beauty of whom he romantically compared with that of a lovely girl whose untimely death was just then a subject of general lamentation. "Had I been," he exclaimed, "the lover of that sweet girl, how would my heart have broken at her loss!" The process through which he passed, in order to become practically a poet, is worthy of record. First, he obliged himself to think of the dead lady till her image became enshrined in his heart. Then he wooed the image till it grew into a reality. Passion was awakened; despair quickly followed; and then Lorenzo began to feel that his heart was sufficiently prepared both for actual love and the composition of verse. The real lady, with whom he became enamoured, received all the homage which poetry and description could render. But she received nothing more. Lorenzo, shortly after, dutifully married the bride selected for him by his father; a daughter of the princely Giacopo Orsini, and whom, it is suspected, he had never seen till the eve of their nuptials.

Scarcely had the death of Piero left Lorenzo and his brother at the head of the republic, when a dangerous conspiracy was formed against them by the rival family of the Pazzi. The hatred of Sixtus IV. to the whole house of Medici assured them of his cooperation. He encouraged his relatives, Girolamo and Raffaello Riario, to take a leading part in the infamous affair. Raffaello, though still a youth, enjoyed the rank of Cardinal, and he obtained for his ready associate Francesco Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa. It was in the palace of the Pazzi, not far from Florence, that the final arrangements were made. The young cardinal expected to be invited to

Lorenzo's villa at Fiesole. There the blow might be struck without noise or danger. But Giuliano's indisposition prevented the looked-for hospitality. The plan was modified to meet the change of circumstances. Sunday, the church, the altar-steps, the moment when the priest should elevate the host,—such were the points agreed upon by the conspirators for the execution of their design. Everything answered to their calculation. Sunday came, the young Medici were in church, they stood with bowed heads before the altar, the host was raised. At that instant a dagger flashed in the air, and the next Giuliano lay mortally wounded on the ground. Lorenzo was attacked at the same moment, but he had time to draw his sword, and employ the cloak, which he slipped from his shoulders, as a shield. A deep wound on the back of his neck had nearly prostrated him, when his attendants recovering from their terror, rushed upon the conspirators, and dragged them from the church. Their crime was visited with condign punishment. Even the archbishop was publicly hanged. The only one who received pardon was the youthful cardinal. He protested his ignorance of the intended murder ; but it is said, that his countenance bore to the day of his death the expression of the horror by which it was convulsed when he found himself chained as a felon.

Lorenzo's resentment did not extend beyond the chiefs of the conspiracy ; and he endeavoured, by the most conciliatory measures, to disarm the malice of the pontiff. But Sixtus was implacable. The miseries of a ruinous war impended over the republic. They could only be averted by the aid of Naples. That state at the time was little favourable to Florence ; and there were parties in the court who regarded Lorenzo with personal dislike. Not a citizen of Florence would have consented

to his trusting himself at Naples. But he felt that no one else could hope to negotiate a peace. Secretly, therefore, and unattended, he stole from the city in the month of December, and hastened forward on his perilous journey. The King of Naples received him with the respect due to his name; and the combined charm and wisdom of his discourse speedily converted both the monarch and his court into ardent friends. Florence greeted his return as a signal of safety and prosperity. This hope was in great measure fulfilled. But Lorenzo's policy has been justly reprobrated as leading eventually to the impoverishment of the republic and the ruin of its liberties. It is allowed that, towards the close of his life, Florence approached a state of bankruptcy, and that his own affairs were so involved at the time, that it was only by a violent financial proceeding the republic could save him from impending ruin. In the month of August, 1490, seventeen members of the government were appointed to examine the accounts of the Treasury. "This commission," it is said, "did not blush to make the country bankrupt, to protect the Medici from bankruptcy."*

Like his father Piero, Lorenzo believed that the only

* Sismondi, *Hist. des Répub. Ital.*, t. xi. ch. xc. p. 337.; Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. ii. ch. viii. p. 132. The views taken by these authors are very different. It is stated by the former, that the public debt, of which the interest was fixed at three per cent., was now to pay but one and a half; while, owing to the distrust thus created, certain funds (*luoghi di monte*), which before sold at twenty-seven crowns, would now fetch only eleven and a half. Pious institutions suffered the loss of their revenues, and the money in circulation was reduced a fifth in value. According to the latter author, it was only justice in the republic to save Lorenzo's private fortune, embarrassed by his devotion to the state. Far more opposed to Sismondi's remarks is the account given by the old writer, Nicolas Valori (*Vita*, p. 174).

safe course now left him, was to withdraw from mercantile speculation, and confine himself to the management of his numerous estates, set free from all burdens by the vote of the republic. His possessions, thus unembarrassed, were of princely extent. He loved farming; and on his estate at Poggio-Cajano, about ten miles from Florence, he had all that could be desired either by the agriculturist or the poet. The beautiful river Ombrone flowed round it, supplying it plentifully with fish, and giving continual verdure to the fields and pastures. Other smaller streams intersected different quarters of the estate, and were led by an aqueduct, constructed at vast expense, for many miles over a broken and mountainous tract of country. The meadows produced three crops of hay in a year; the cheese made on the farm was sufficient for the supply of all Florence and its neighbourhood; and the orchards and gardens abounded every season with the most delicious fruits. So rich were the plantations of mulberry-trees, that Lorenzo's friends laughingly said, that they expected he would occasion a quick reduction in the price of silk; and his woods round the villa were all well stocked with pheasants and peacocks which he had obtained from Sicily.

At Careggi Lorenzo had another estate, smaller, but almost equally calculated to delight the lover of rural retirement by the beauty of its situation and grounds. At Fiesole he had a third, and it was there he most frequently enjoyed the society of the learned men whom he delighted to assemble round him. Nor was the landed wealth of Lorenzo confined to these possessions in the neighbourhood of Florence; he had estates in many other parts of Tuscany, one especially, at Caffagiolo, which his grandfather Cosmo is said to have proudly

admired, because all the land that he could see from his windows was his own.

The pleasure which Lorenzo took in the cultivation of his grounds, and other country occupations, accounts for the prevalence of rural images in his poetry. Few writers can excel him in the variety or beauty of his descriptions; and in his philosophical poems, he displays with equal taste his enthusiasm for learning, and his love of the country. Nor was the influence which he exercised during his agreeable retirement less powerful than his voice in the council-chamber at Florence. Besides directing the minds of men of genius to the cultivation of their native literature, he was the great promoter of the Platonic philosophy, which had been advancing in Tuscany since the time of his grandfather Cosmo. That celebrated man becoming acquainted with a learned Greek, named Gemisto Pletone, heard with delight his exposition of the Platonic doctrines. Not willing that such sublime knowledge should remained concealed or unfruitful, he determined to institute an academy for its study; and for this purpose had Marsiglio Ficino, the son of his physician, and then quite a lad, educated according to his directions, and instructed in the reading of Plato. Ficino's talents were worthy of the cultivation they received: he became one of the most learned philosophers known in modern times, and, in a short period, found himself at the head of an academy established according to the model left by his great master. Among the members of this institution were the famous Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Filippo Valori, who wrote the memoirs of our poet, Cristoforo Landini, and others of equal note. Lorenzo's mind was imbued, almost from infancy, with Platonism, and his favourite relaxation was to discourse with Ficino and his other

friends on topics connected with its elucidation. So enthusiastic was he in his admiration of the system, that he was known to say, that a man could be neither a politician, nor properly a Christian, without studying Plato:* an observation, it may be remarked, no less erroneous when applied to religion, than when applied to poetry. This it frequently was, and it led men to suppose that truth and beauty, pure and intelligible in themselves, are to be rendered more so by our viewing them through an artificial medium — an idea, however, long prevalent, and the effects of which were as hurtful to the imagination as the reason, to the Muse as to the Church. But Lorenzo, conceiving that he was promoting the true interest of learning by these studies, omitted nothing which might render them more popular. To this end, he resolved to re-establish the solemn commemoration of Plato's birth and death, both which, it was said, occurred on the fifteenth of November, a day kept sacred for many years by all his ancient disciples. Lorenzo had every facility for putting such a design in practice, and his Platonic festivals were long celebrated for the learned discussions which took place at them, for their influence on the minds of educated men, and the elegance and hospitality which marked them as social meetings.

The love which Lorenzo felt for his country did not prevent his cherishing an anxious desire to establish the dignity of his family by every means fairly in his power. The time of life at which he was now arrived rendered him the more solicitous on this point, and everything seemed to aid him in the accomplishment of his wishes. Three sons and four daughters were the

* Valori.

survivors of a still more numerous family borne him by his wife Clarice. Of the former, Giovanni, his second son, became the celebrated Leo X., and Giuliano, the next in age, obtained by alliance the dukedom of Nemours. Piero, the eldest, was not so fortunate; but his adversities were owing to his own misconduct and vices. In the education of these sons, Lorenzo employed the most accomplished of the learned men who frequented his house, and always professed to consider their instruction as one of the first and most necessary of his cares. By his politic management of the influence which he possessed at the court of Rome, he succeeded in obtaining for Giovanni a rich abbey before he was eight years old, and saw him elevated, by the time he was thirteen, to the rank of Cardinal—the first instance that had occurred of an ecclesiastic's obtaining that dignity at so early an age.

But, while rejoicing in the success which thus attended his exertions, he had the misfortune to lose his wife, for whom he appears to have cherished a strong and uniform affection. This event took place in August 1488, and, to add to the affliction, it occurred during his absence from home. At the commencement of the year 1492, his health, which had been gradually growing worse, began to show signs of a still more rapid decline, and he was shortly after attacked by a fever, which, though slow, and at first scarcely perceptible in its effects, was soon beyond the power of his physicians to eradicate. He was himself conscious of his danger, and, composing his mind to serious reflection, became thenceforth almost wholly occupied in conversing or meditating on subjects of religion. In this solemn preparation for his last hour, he was aided by the studies of his youth. He had been, it was said by his enemies, guilty of excesses which ill became his character, and some of his poetry is justly

termed light and licentious; but the feelings of piety and devotion, implanted by the early habits of his mind, were never effaced, nor was the general course of his life adverse to these principles. His conduct as a father was irreproachable, and there seems to be strong evidence to prove that it was so as a husband. In the almost boundless transactions which he carried on as a merchant, he was distinguished for his liberality and probity; and, in his public character, his ambition appears never to have overcome his patriotism. His treasures were always open to the wants of the republic, and we have seen how ready he was on all occasions to sacrifice his ease, which he knew so well how to enjoy, and even his personal safety for the good of his countrymen. His care for their spiritual wants was shown by the building or reforming of several religious houses, the most esteemed mark of piety in those days; while the hymns which he composed are written in the most fervent style of devotional eloquence.

As death approached, he desired the last and most solemn rites of the Church.* These received, he called his son Piero to his bed-side, and said, "You are not to expect that in a republic, which, though but one body, has many heads, you can always conduct yourself so as to please every one:—remember, therefore, on all occasions, to pursue the line of conduct marked out by the strictest integrity, and to regard the interests of the whole, not the wishes of a part of the community." Soon after this interview between Lorenzo and his son, Poliziano, his old and affectionate friend, and who has so

* His sister Blanche was among the foremost of his spiritual advisers. Warning him of his danger, she said, "You have lived, my brother, nobly to this day. It is now for you to die, not nobly only, but piously."—Valori, *Vita*, p. 181.

pathetically described the interview in one of his letters *, entered the room. The sick man took his hands, and clasping them strongly, looked him at the same time in the face with a smile so tender and composed, that Poliziano was unable to refrain from weeping. Lorenzo still held the hands of his friend, expecting the emotion would cease, but loosened his grasp when he found it continue, and Poliziano, in an agony of sorrow, hastened out of the room. On his return to the chamber, Lorenzo inquired after Pico of Mirandola, and expressed a desire to see him. This wish was immediately attended to, and he conversed for some time, on various subjects, with a calmness and cheerfulness which astonished and charmed them. Savonarola, the Prior of St. Mark's, the haughty reformer and great enemy of the Medici, next arrived, and examined him as to the state of his mind and conscience; but he chiefly came, it is affirmed, to aid his own purposes, which were to overthrow, on the first opportunity, the power of the family. This, however, he failed in doing, and fell a victim to his supposed fanaticism. Lorenzo was not ignorant of his disposition; but, on his leaving the room, he called him back, and requested his benediction, thus intimating his perfect forgiveness of the injuries he had plotted against him. After the departure of Savonarola, death made rapid and visible approaches. Again, therefore, embracing his friends, and receiving the sacrament, he ceased from conversation, and appeared wholly occupied in silent devotion, only manifesting that he still lived by breathing out some text of Scripture, and raising his eyes towards heaven. When the last moment arrived, he pressed a crucifix reverentially to his lips, and in that act expired.

* Lib. iv. Ep. 2.

The merit of Lorenzo as a poet is due to his power of describing natural objects, and to the nervous conciseness and elegance of language with which he could explain in verse a system of philosophy. One of his principal compositions, the "Altercazione" unfolds the Platonic doctrines, and, at the same time, exhibits many pictures of rural scenes which charm the reader by their truth and freshness. The "Selve d' Amore," "Nencio da Barbareno," and "La Caccia col Falcone" were all popular in their time; while some of his religious verses had admirers who repeated them in their devotions. No doubt the splendour of his station, his style as "Il Magnifico*," his wealth and power, had influence with many; and when we read of their comparing him to Dante and Petrarch, we cannot help suspecting that they had been feasted in the proud halls of his palace, and had come away dazzled by their grandeur.

But Lorenzo had this real claim to honour. He was one of the reformers of poetical literature. Till he lived and wrote, his countrymen had been for a hundred years forgetful of the art. The stream of melody which had flowed forth at the command of Dante and Petrarch, had been choked up by huge masses of ill-digested learning. Lorenzo set the fountain free again, and taught his countrymen to delight in the sweetness all its own.

* A nice distinction is made by Sismondi on the subject of this title. Lorenzo was not called Lorenzo "Il Magnifico," but "Il Magnifico Lorenzo."

POLIZIANO.



ANGIOLO POLIZIANO was born July 14, 1454, and is celebrated for his poetical talents, his learning, and close intimacy with Lorenzo de' Medici. His familiar name is derived from Monte Pulciano, the place of his birth. Benedictus de Cinis, or de Ambroginis, his father, was a doctor of civil law, and a man of worth and ability.* A large share of his moderate income was expended in the education of his son. Placed under the most celebrated scholars of the day, Angiolo made those rapid advances in erudition which rendered him, at an early age, the wonder of his country. But it was the favour of the Medici which saved him from the most painful struggles of literary life. The "Giostra," a poem celebrating Giuliano's triumph in a tournament, was universally admired, and at once obtained him the generous support of Lorenzo. Italian critics give Poliziano the praise of having brought to perfection, in this poem, the "ottava rima" of Boccaccio.

But it was with him, as with other men of ability in that age. The learned and philosophical spirit of the times daunted the lighter genius of poetry; and thus,

* Vita, Abate Serassi. Tiraboschi, t. vi. pt. iii. p. 1069.

while it conferred one intellectual good upon the world, it took away another, as if we must pay for the light by which we walk or labour, by resigning that which gives life and beauty to the flowers.

Skill in classical composition was a sure road to patronage, and was absolutely necessary to all who made learning a profession. The fame also which Poliziano had acquired by his epigrams was even greater than that which attended the publication of the "*Giostra*." It is not surprising, therefore, that, when he became tutor to Lorenzo's children, and a member of his Platonic Academy, he allowed his classical predilections to overcome his love for the less elevated verse of his native language.

Substantial rewards seemed to prove the wisdom of his choice. Having assumed the ecclesiastical habit, he was made Prior of St. Paul's, and soon after obtained a canonry in the cathedral of Florence. If learning could deserve preferment, he merited these appointments. He was among the first and most laborious of critics; and we are largely indebted to him for the purer text of many of the Latin classics. In addition to his more regular "*Annotations*," he gave to the world a collection of "*Miscellanea*." These, he informs us, owed their existence to his conversations with Lorenzo, as they took the air together on horseback, and when he generally communicated the thoughts which had struck him during the studies of the morning.

But the most important fruit of his labours was a correct edition of the Pandects of Justinian. A copy of the book, said to have been deposited at Pisa by the emperor himself, had lately been discovered, and was placed, at the instance of Lorenzo, in the hands of Poliziano. Numerous and important errors were detected in all the other manuscripts with which it was compared;

and it is generally confessed, by those who have laboured to free Roman jurisprudence from forensic barbarism, that he was the first to employ on the study all the available lights of history and criticism.* His edition, carefully prepared, was published at Venice in 1485; and was enriched with prefaces, various readings, and the Greek laws, not inserted in the text.

While engaged on this important work, he was also successfully labouring to render the study of Greek literature more than ever popular among his countrymen. He had been appointed to the professorship; and his lectures attracted hearers not only from various parts of Italy, but from foreign countries; our own countryman, Thomas Linacer, being among the readiest to pay homage to his learning. "Such," he himself says, "was the ardour with which Greek was studied, that Athens, with its language, and all its literary glories, seemed transported into Florence."† But he was not allowed to enjoy his reputation unassailed. Some of his own countrymen charged him with wholesale plagiarism; others accused him of infidelity; and he was attacked with unsparing virulence by some native Greeks, whom he had maddened by insultingly boasting, that he was better acquainted with their language than they were themselves.

Far more distressing to him than any of these disputes were the changes which followed the death of Lorenzo. In the course of a few years after that event, the Medici became as hateful to the people of Florence as they were formerly beloved. Poliziano had to endure a full share of their unpopularity; and when the noble Laurentian library fell a prey to the infuriated mob, his

* Serassi.

† Ibid.

own collection perished with it. Deeply affected by this occurrence, and the distresses of his friends, he rapidly drooped under an increasing weight of sorrow and infirmity. His death took place in September 1494, the question being long after agitated, whether he left the world as a Christian, or as a heathen philosopher.

Contemporary with Poliziano were several poets, whose names properly occupy a conspicuous place in the history of Italian literature. But we have no record of their lives. All that is known of the three Pulci is, that they were fostered by the Medici, and shared the fortunes of the family. LUIGI PULCI, the best known of the brothers, was born at Florence, in the year 1432. As the author of the "*Morgante Maggiore*" he enjoyed a popularity equal to that of his most distinguished countrymen; but he is said to have died at Padua in the extreme of poverty and wretchedness. A vast amount of very ingenious criticism has been expended on the "*Morgante*." By some writers it is considered as properly a romantic poem, derived from the legitimate sources of old tradition, and blending only so much of the grotesque with the solemn and pathetic, as is found in some of the most serious compositions of mediæval times. By others, it is described as simply ludicrous and satirical; and the arguments of the two sides are so nicely balanced, that it has never yet been settled, whether the author intended to convey a moral, or only to excite laughter.

But the disputes which have existed among Italian critics respecting the true character of the "*Morgante Maggiore*," are not more curious than those which have

attended the examination of an author of far less intelligible ability than Luigi Pulci. Contemporarily with him flourished the writer, to whom the credit has been generally given of having invented that peculiar class of humorous poetry, described by the epithet burlesque. DOMENICO DI GIOVANNI, or BURCHIELLO, has left no record of the time or place of his birth.* But he is said to have been at the height of his reputation as a poet, or, as his countrymen express it, in the flower of his phantasy, in the year 1415. It is also said, that he was enrolled in the company of barbers at Florence, and that in 1432 he was exercising his art in a shop situated about the middle of the street di Calimala.

It does not appear what the circumstances of his parents had been, but Negri says, that having rapidly wasted his little inheritance, necessity compelled him to become a barber. His shop was the rendezvous of the principal literary men of Florence; and in a picture of it, it is represented as divided into two parts, in the one of which Burchiello appears as the barber, in the other as the poet and the companion of scholars. Very little is known of his life; but he appears, from two or three passages in his poems, to have committed some misdemeanour at one period of his career, for which he was thrown into prison. His offence was not sufficiently great to deprive him of friends; and having married, he at last took up his residence in Rome, where he died about the year 1448.

By some critics Burchiello is unceremoniously termed a crack-brained (*un cervallo stravolto*); by others, a poetic buffoon (*un buffon Febeo*), and so on; while

* Negri. *Istoria di Fiorentini Scrittori*. Manni. Veglie Piacevoli. and Mazzuchelli. *Art. Burchiello*.

others actually place him immediately after Dante and Petrarch. Nor is it by mere assertion that men of eminence have shown their affection for the strange, and nearly unintelligible, eccentricities of this poet. Il Doni stands at the head of these his admirers, and his Commentary on his Sonnets is one of the most curious pieces of criticism, or specimens of interpretation, in existence. The learned expositor not only confesses that he cannot understand his author, but remarks, that he wrote, as it were, in ciphers, and that he believes he could not have explained what he meant himself. It may easily be imagined what kind of a commentary an author would write on a work of which he had so hopeful an opinion. The explanations, in fact, of Doni are generally allowed to have thrown no light on the mysteries of Burchiello, and it has been wittily observed, that, instead of its being called a Commentary on the verses of Burchiello, by Doni, it might be entitled The Commentary of Doni, put into rhyme by Burchiello.* Doni, however, was not the only author who undertook to explain what he acknowledged to be the unexplainable obscurity of Burchiello. The facetious Berni commenced a commentary on his poems, but left it unfinished; and others were written by authors of less celebrity, but equally enthusiastic in their admiration of his style and sentiments.

Burchiello is said to have adopted the fantastic mode of composition which has rendered him so famous, from the politic consideration, that, as he had no chance of rivalling the great poets of his age, in the regular species of writing, he could only acquire distinction by leaving the direct, for an obscure and untraversed, path to the temple of Fame.† His experiment, if such were indeed

* Mazzuchelli.

† Negri. Scritt. Floren.

his thoughts, succeeded as far as such an experiment could; but it is a rare and eccentric species of literary vanity, that can find gratification in popularity without readers, or in praises for inventions not understood.

But this poet was not the only writer of the age who thus forsook the path of nature and common sense to acquire a name. While Lorenzo de' Medici, and his friend Poliziano, were endeavouring to restore the pure and classic style of Dante and Petrarch, and while Luigi Pulci was amusing the most enlightened personages with sparkling imitations of the old romances, a new school, in fact, was in progress of formation; all the members of which, like Burchiello, claimed the attention of the public, not on the plea of classical correctness, romantic interest, or even clever satire, but on the ingenuity evinced in splitting an idea into an infinity of notions, and then putting them together in every possible form of fantastic imagery.

Tibaldeo, a physician of Ferrara, is the reputed head of this school, and his immediate imitators were Serafino Aquilano, Cei, Cornazzani, and many others, whose names have sunk into merited oblivion. But to these we may advantageously oppose that of GIROLAMO BENEVIENI, who claims mention as another of the literary companions of Lorenzo de' Medici, and more especially as one of the writers to whom his countrymen ascribe a part of the merit due to the restorers of their poetry. Instead of imitating the corrupt style which had so long prevailed, or following that which such writers as Serafino were about to render fashionable, he carefully imitated Dante and Petrarch, disdaining even to let the popular authors of the "Morgante Maggiore," or the "Ceriffo Calvaneo," tempt him into the commission of their vulgarisms. An Italian critic remarks, that he has not been sufficiently

distinguished among the geniuses of his time, but that he was, in fact, the glory of their class, and the ornament of literature, more especially of Tuscan poetry.*

He lived to the age of ninety, and is said to have exhibited as many excellent qualities in his life as in the productions of his mind. The Count Pico of Mirandola employed him as his almoner; and loved to speak of his piety and integrity no less than of his genius.

The principal of Benivieni's poems is a canzone on celestial and divine love, on which Pico della Mirandola wrote a long and learned comment. Both the poem and the comment are founded on the Platonic theory respecting the passion of which they treat. Among his prose works are a Commentary on his own poems; an Epistle to Clement VII., and a memoir entitled, "*Della Semplicità della Vita Christiana di Frate Geronimo da Ferrara*" written originally in Latin.

Of the founders of that new school of poetry which had so evil an effect on the national literature, SERAFINO AQUILANO was, perhaps, the most distinguished. He was born at Aquila in the year 1466, and acquired so much reputation for his verses, that he was regarded by his admirers as a second Petrarch; a compliment which it was long the fashion in Italy to bestow on any popular poet of the time. Numerous were the patrons enjoyed by Serafino; and his short life appears to have been passed in a succession of visits from one court to another. The King of Naples, the Duke of Urbino, the Marquis of Mantua, Lodovico Sforza Duke of Milan, and Valentine Cæsar Borgia, were among his friends and admirers, and at their respective courts he displayed all the accomplishments which were most likely to render his

* Negri, Ist. Floren. Scritt. p. 300.

society acceptable to the gay and refined. It was not to any personal attractions that he owed his popularity. His swarthy face was rendered stern and gloomy by heavy eye-brows, and a profusion of black hair; while his short, round figure seemed framed only for indolence. But he could improvise verses with such wonderful facility, and accompany his singing so charmingly on the lute; could run, leap, and dance, with such agility and skill; and intermingle all he did with conversation so full of point and humour, that people judged of his appearance, not by the reality, but by the pleasure which he gave them. He died at Rome, in the thirty-fourth or thirty-fifth year of his age, and notwithstanding the great popularity which he enjoyed during life, his reputation survived him scarcely fifty years. Another instance is thus afforded of the great difference between the poetry which pleases when sung to a lute, or when poured out at some moment, peculiarly favourable both to the hearer and the bard, and that which is to afford permanent delight, and bear the grasp of the mind in solitude, and when the imagination and the reason are simultaneously intent upon the subject.

ANTONIO TIBALDEO, the physician of Ferrara, was born, according to some authors, in 1456, and according to others in 1463. Another point also in dispute respecting him is, whether or not he received the laurel crown from Frederick III. Leo X., it is said, gave him five hundred golden ducats for a single epigram. But in 1527 he was suffering from distress and want. Cardinal Bembo rendered him generous aid, and a few years after, that is, in 1535, he is represented as keeping in bed; making epigrams as fluently as ever; surrounded by literary gossips; vowing eternal hostility to the Imperialists; and complaining of nothing but the want of

wine. He lived to the age of eighty, and has had the credit of exciting one of those controversies, so much in vogue, as we have seen, among the learned of Italy, respecting the proper characteristics of poetry, or the elements, by the preponderance of which it is to be denominated good or bad.*

FRANCESCO CEI, a Florentine, and a contemporary of the poets just named, was another of those who enjoyed the certainly not rare compliment of being compared to Petrarch, to whom he was said to be only second, and whom others said he equalled and even surpassed. But the better sense of subsequent critics have placed him in his true rank, and Francesco Cei is only known to the curious in literary history. GIUSTO DE' CONTI was a Roman, and of senatorial rank. He lived some few years earlier in the fifteenth century than the above-named writers, and his work entitled "*La Bella Mano*" is regarded as not undeserving the praise it originally received. It may easily be imagined, however, that it is far from being free from ingenious absurdities. Giusto never loses sight of the "*Bella Mano*" of his mistress, and he rings an infinity of changes on a single finger.†

Milan, in the latter part of the fifteenth century, and under the government of the celebrated Lodovico Sforza, or, as he is usually called, *Il Moro*, rivalled Florence, both in its patronage of the arts, and as the nurse of learned men. It was at Milan that some of the best poets and painters of other countries sought that encouragement which was denied them at home, and grew into fame and eminence. Among the poets of this era mentioned with esteem, was ANTONIO FULGOSO, a

* Barotti, *Scritt. Fer. art. Tibaldeo*.

† Gravina *Ragion.* p. 118.

Genoese by birth, but who lived for many years in the Court of Lodovico. His principal poems are "Il Riso di Democrito," "Il Pianto d'Eracito," and "La Corva Bianca." ANTONIO CORNAZZANI DAL BORZETTI was another writer, who also found a munificent patron in Il Moro. When that Prince lost the throne which he had usurped, both Fulgoso and Cornazzani were obliged to seek other abodes; and while the former retired to his villa near Melegnano, the latter appears to have wandered about, till he finally found a home in the Court of the Duke of Ferrara. The works of this writer are numerous, and of various kinds; thus, in one part of the catalogue, we find a Life of Christ, and of the Virgin Mary, and in another, a treatise in terza rima, "De Re Militari," on one side, a poem "De Modo Regendi," and on another a Life of Francesco Sforza, and of Pietro Avogadro.* These are but a small portion of his works, some of which are in Latin; but whatever glimpses of ability they afford, the subjects are sufficient to show, that he had not a very clear judgment respecting the true design, or proper object of poetic invention. GASPARO VISCONTI is also mentioned in the history of the period as a poet of considerable ability, his chief work being a romance relating the history of two lovers, Paolo and Daria, in ottava rima.† But by far the greatest ornament of Lodovico's court was the admirable LEONARDO DA VINCI, who, had he gained less celebrity in another art, would have furnished me with a name on which to dwell with lengthened pleasure. The same observations will apply to MICHAEL ANGELO. The genius indeed of both these great men carried them along a much sublimer path than that attempted by the poets of

* Tiraboschi, vol. vi. 842.

† Idem. vol. vi. 831.

their times; nor is it, perhaps, a wholly improbable conjecture, that it was the low and artificial taste in poetry which then prevailed, that led such lofty-minded men and true poets to reject the language of words, and seek a freer mode of expressing their conceptions.

There was a Ferrarese poet, whose calamity and talents induce us to wish that we knew more of him than simply, that he lived and died in poverty. FRANCESCO CIECO, the blind poet of Ferrara, was a writer of considerable genius, and there are allusions to his infirmity in different parts of his poems, and an acknowledged hope of undying reputation, which the English reader will feel were inspired by the same emotions as those which gave rise to more than one passage in the works of Milton.

I might extend this catalogue of names much farther, but it would only be to speak of men who exercised no influence on the literature of their country, or of whom there is little notice taken in its annals; and however willing the biographer might be to rescue a neglected name from oblivion, he is so dependent for his materials on the age which was guilty of the neglect, that he is usually obliged to follow the same course, and let the dust lie where the ashes were so early forgotten.

BOIARDO.

WE have but scant materials for the life of Count Matteo Maria Boiardo. Such as they are, they gleam pleasantly with the lights and shadows of mediæval tradition. Though born in the year 1430*, the romantic character of feudal times still held sway in his paternal castle of Scandiano, and the neighbouring lordship of Reggio. As the descendant of a long line of nobles, he inherited the chivalrous graces and virtues for which the high-born of that age were generally distinguished. But he had also the singular advantage of being born of parents who valued intellectual endowments no less than the privileges of rank. Matteo was, therefore, placed under the most eminent professors of Ferrara, and acquired a knowledge of philosophy, and of Greek and Latin, which would have done him credit had he been simply bred a scholar.

His rank as Count of Scandiano, a fertile territory at the foot of the Apennines, and his eminent abilities, naturally gave him rank at the Court of Ferrara. He became the friend as well as minister of its princes; and

* Some authors say in 1434; and Reggio, Fratta, and Ferrara make equal claim to the honour of his birth-place. Barotti, *Letterai Ferraresi*. Ferrara. 1792. p. 69. Tiraboschi, *Biblioteca Modenese*, t. i. p. 287.

festive pomps, embassies, and treaties, were alike intrusted to his charge.

There was nothing in these employments to prevent the cultivation of his genius. The burden of statesmanship lay lightly even on the prime minister of the Court of Ferrara; and when called to Rome to see the investiture of Borso, or to head the train of Eleanora of Arragon, on her marriage with Hercules, the poet was but reaping a rich harvest of the very materials needed for his purpose.

Latin eclogues, and Italian canzone and sonnets, were the first productions of his muse. The former are grave and elegant; the latter are so radiant with sparkling images, that no effort of ingenuity is required to recommend them. We find room for a single sonnet:—

Che non fa il tempo in fin ? questo è quel fiore
 Che fu da quella man gentile accolto,
 E sì leggiadramente ad oro involto,
 Che eterno esser dovea di tanto onore.
 Or secco, senza foglie e senza odore,
 Discolorito, misero e disciolto,
 Ciò che gli diè natura, il tempo ha tolto,
 Il tempo che volando affretta l'ore.
 Ben s' assimiglia a un fior la nostra etate,
 Che stato cangia da mattina a sera,
 E sempre va scemando sua beltate.
 A questo guarda, disdegnosa e altera;
 Abbi, se non di me, di te pietate,
 Acciò che indarno tua beltà non pera.

Ah ! what does time not ruin ? This fair flower
 Culled by thy gentle hand in early morn,
 And tressed in gold around it nicely drawn,
 Seeming a prize for ever,—not the hour,—
 Now withered, leafless lies : gone its sweet power
 To charm by fragrance : of its beauty shorn,
 And all the sparkling hues it wore at dawn.
 Thus time mars all : mars kindly nature's dower.
 Be then that flower an emblem of our state,
 Still on the change from early dawn to eve :
 Decay subduing forms the most elate,
 Refusing aught that's fair unspoiled to leave.
 Pity then, if not me, thyself ; lest fate
 Doom thee too soon o'er wasted charms to grieve.

These poems are as unlike Petrarch's as Petrarch himself was unlike Boiardo; but neither the tender grace of the one, nor the more visible beauty of the other, is lessened by this dissimilarity. As a point of biography, it has been inquired, to whom Boiardo addresses his verses? The answer usually given points to a young lady of Reggio, Antonia Caprara, who however, from some cause, not recorded, became the wife, not of the elegant and accomplished Boiardo, but of some old, miserly, decrepit man,—

“ Whose face,
Nature ashamed, confessed was her disgrace.” *

So, at least, the poet speaks of Antonia's husband. Were it a matter of any importance, history might be bound to examine the worth of a testimony given under such circumstances. But like most of the loves of Italian poets, the passion of Boiardo is clouded in mystery; and it still remains undetermined, whether his one hundred and eighty canzone and sonetti were not addressed to almost as many ladies.

In 1472 he married the daughter of the Count of Novellara; and some few years after was made successively governor of Reggio, and Modena.† He remained capitano of Modena till 1487, when he again became governor of Reggio. His conduct in this situation, was eminently popular and amiable. He hated oppression, and with invincible good humour encountered the wrath of all the lawyers of Reggio, by settling disputes before they could interfere. Such even was his love of mercy, that nothing but extreme necessity could compel him to

* Ormai si scopra
Quel volto, onde natura si vergogna
D'aver prodotta al mondo cotal opra. — *Eglog.* viii.

† Barotti. *Let. Fer.* vol. i. p. 104.; *Bibliotec. Moden.* t. i. p. 295.

inflict capital punishment. No crime, he stoutly argued, justified a sentence of death.

But the castle and forests of Scandiano were only a few miles distant from Reggio. In that old romantic fortress, and in the deep woods by which it was surrounded, the feudal lord could readily transport himself back to the times of Orlando, and other kindred spirits. The outward world had not, as yet, undergone any great change. Every room in the old castle was the same as it had been when Charlemagne, or his paladins, sought hasty shelter under its roof. The grey, moss-clad stones of the walls and turrets bore only the same marks of age as in former times; and if the neighbouring forests were ever fit to tempt adventurous knights by the promise of strange encounters, their gloomy depths, and intricate windings, might, for another century to come, still excite the same thrilling fancies; the same chivalrous defiance of unknown enemies and dangers.

Boiardo felt the full delight and advantage of yielding himself to these impressions. As he sat and meditated in one of the chambers of the castle, surrounded by the banners and effigies of his ancestors, or rode solitary through the forest, Orlando and his adventures grew into realities upon the stage of his fervid imagination. Thus the most genuine of romantic poems was the creation of a man who approached the nearest of all poets, in character and condition, to the personages described. Tradition fondly speaks of his appropriating every old knightly name in the neighbourhood to some purpose of his narrative. It tells us, how he sought among his feudatories for stories of high achievement, or of mysterious discomfiture in battles with giants and sorcerers; and it describes the joy which seized him when, on a sudden, there flashed into his mind the high-sounding name of Rodomante.

This was the crowning triumph of a long day's ride through the forest. Rodomante! Rodomante! the poet shouted, till the woods re-echoed with the sound. Then turning his horse homeward, he dashed up the avenue to the castle, and summoning the porter, ordered him to ring the turret-bells in honour of Rodomante! As neither the porter nor any of the grooms had ever heard of Rodomante, they concluded that he was a new saint, just added to the calendar.

Happy as Boiardo was, in his baronial and romantic life, he was no less so in his literary career. He reaped the golden harvest of fame, as quickly as he sowed the seed. Unlike most other writers, especially of long narrative poems, he had not to wait for years before enjoying the encouraging smile of applause, or to labour at correction, and then depend, when all was finished, on the capricious humour of the public. As soon as a canto was composed, he took it with him to Ferrara; and there, in the presence of a brilliant court, ready, from the Prince to the youngest page, to applaud him, he recited his gay and charming inventions.

Boiardo died at Reggio, towards the close of the year 1494, and was buried in the great church of Scandiano. His life is unimportant as a subject of biography, but it acquires a more interesting character, when his name is remembered as associated with the first great romantic poem which Italy produced. Had he been a citizen of Florence, instead of a favoured baron at the court of Ferrara, he would either have imitated the laughing irony of Luigi Pulci, or attempted some epic like Bernardo Tasso. It ought not indeed to be forgotten, that while he was amusing the people and nobles of Ferrara, or Reggio, with wild and extravagant legends, Florence had learnt to understand and relish the stern, sedate

language of Dante,—the severest, and most awful form of satiric truth: that there also the classic Petrarch, and the tasteful Boccaccio, were the chief favourites of every class of people; while Lorenzo de' Medici and his friends had begun to make poetry the professed vehicle of philosophy, and almost to enthrone the latter on the seat of the formér. Such an opportunity as this of comparing the state of literature under different contemporary governments of the same country is of rare occurrence. The literary history of Italy has, in this respect, a peculiar value. It shows us the influence of political circumstances on the intellectual tastes and habits of a people; and furnishes more materials than any other for illustrating the connection between their government and their literature.

Boiardo translated several works both from Greek and Latin, and was equal in erudition to the best scholars of the age.*

As illustrative of the different course taken by men of genius under different circumstances, we may mention that class of distinguished writers, who, though Italian poets, intrusted their best thoughts to Latin verse. This old classic strain must always have charms for a cultivated ear and elegant mind. The beauty even of its conventional metaphors; the compactness of its phraseology; its stream-like flowing, confer properties on Latin poetry, rarely found in any other. But to the ear of an Italian, Latin verse was the basis of the delicate harmony

* Boiardo is the reputed translator of the old Ferrarese chronicler Riccobaldo. Of this work Muratori, to the indignation of Barotti and others, speaks as an ingenious fabrication of Boiardo's mingled credulity and fancy.—*Rerum Italic. Script.* t. ix. p. 99—281.

which characterised his language in all its most musical moods. To him neither its sound nor its idioms are foreign. He has not the feeling which the Latin versifiers of other countries must sometimes have, that he is in pure pedantry repudiating his mother-tongue. Distant but grand associations are connected in his mind with all the expressions he employs; and his imagination rejoices in the idea, that he is embalming his thoughts in the ancient language of his home; of his forefathers, — men who enjoyed a nearer communion with the spirit of divine verse than any in modern days. It was, no doubt, from feelings of this kind that JACOPO SANAZZARO, VIDA, and some others, devoted themselves with such enthusiasm to classical composition, and produced those exquisite specimens of Latin verse, which have been the admiration of every succeeding age.

The first mentioned of these authors was born at Naples, in the year 1458*, and could boast of his descent from the Sanazzari, a noble family of Pavia, of whom Dante makes mention in his "Convivio." After having acquired large possessions in the kingdom of Naples, it suffered reverses which left the father of our poet dependent upon a patrimony barely sufficient to meet the necessities of his station. At his death, his widow Masella devoted herself and moderate fortune to the education of her two sons. Jacopo speedily fulfilled the prediction of the old grammarian Giuniano Majo, that whatever was expended on his studies would be repaid with ample interest. In some few years, he became a chief favourite at the court of Naples. On the accession of Prince Frederic to the throne, his own ambition, united with the promises by which it had been long cherished,

* Elogio. Gio. Bat. Cormanì.

led him to expect a more than usual measure of wealth and honours. He was disappointed. The new monarch gave away the governorship of towns with a liberal hand to other courtiers, but on the poet he bestowed only a pension of six hundred ducats, and the Villa Mergolino. At first, Sanazzaro, complained bitterly of this treatment, and asked the king how it was, that he had made him a poet, and then disposed of him as a farmer? In after years, the Villa Mergolino became to him the most valued of all possessions, and the dearest spot on earth.

When political troubles drove Frederic from his dominions, Sanazzaro faithfully accompanied him in his exile, and even supplied his wants, raising money for him by the sale of his patrimony, and soothing him on his death-bed, by the tenderest display of loyalty and friendship.

On his return to Naples, after many years sojourn abroad, Sanazzaro soon became reconciled to the new order of things, and was treated with all the respect due to his eminent talents. He had lost, during his exile in France, his beloved Bonifacia*, the subject of his most popular sonnets and canzone. But the wound thus inflicted on his heart was somewhat more than healed by a sublime and spiritual passion for the lady Cassandra, the favourite companion of the queen. The beauty and accomplishments of this courtly dame had induced the proud Marquis della Tripalda, to seek her hand in marriage. His offer was accepted; the bridal arrangements were complete; when, suddenly, the marquis repented,

* A love answering somewhat to that of Dante for Beatrice. It commenced when the poet was eight years old. When, a few years later, he wished to declare it, he failed of resolution. "Quando in sua presenza io era, impallidiva, tremava, e diventava mutolo."—*Arcadia. Prosa Settima.*

and applied to the Pope for a dissolution of the contract. The Court was in an uproar ; but first and foremost stood Sanazzaro, armed as a champion of the insulted lady. Availing himself of his literary influence, he wrote to Cardinal Bembo, intreating him to prevent the Pope from helping the wicked old marquis in his faithless conduct. But the application came too late ; and the lady of his love was now free to receive his own addresses, in any form he might think proper to make them. He only continued, however, as before, to show his delight in her conversation, and to praise her as the most accomplished of her sex. In one respect, perhaps, he equalled a more ardent lover. Some few years later, on the removal of the Court to Somma, in consequence of the appearance of the plague at Naples, he and Cassandra could only find apartments in mansions more than a mile distant from each other. Sanazzaro, who had nearly reached the age of seventy, never suffered a day to pass without walking to see her, her smiles and conversation amply rewarding him for his pains.

The "Arcadia," a mixture of pastoral prose and verse, with the sonnets and canzone of his earlier years, had already procured him a fair share of popular reputation. But this was far from satisfying his ambition ; and he had now for some years, been employed on his Latin poem "De Partu Virginis." The patience and care with which he pursued this work are scarcely credible. Among his most intimate friends was a gentleman, named Poderico, blind, and greatly advanced in years, but remarkable for his elegant taste, and acquaintance with the best authors of antiquity. To him Sanazzaro read every passage of his poem, as he composed it ; and such was the nicety of the critic's ear, and the caution of the author, that the latter would write as many as ten several

lines to express the same thought, leaving it to Poderico to determine which should be retained.

Twenty years were expended in this manner before the work was finished. Sanazzaro dedicated it, in the first instance, to Leo X., but that pontiff died too soon for the realisation of his hopes of patronage. With a very pardonable consideration, therefore, of self-interest, he cancelled the original dedication, and addressed another, in 1527 to Clement VII. Clement graciously expressed his satisfaction on receiving the poem, and spoke of the pleasure with which he should see the author at Rome, but he gave him neither office nor pension.

This disappointment does not seem to have materially affected the tranquillity of his declining years. Political events proved a far more permanent cause of anger and vexation. In the attack upon Naples, by the French general, Lautrec, the Villa Mergoglino and its neighbourhood offered the most favourable position for his advanced guard. The Prince of Orange resolved, at all risk, to dislodge him from this post, and in the course of a night, Sanazzaro's beloved villa and gardens became a mass of ruins. But the reasons which convinced the prince of the necessity of this measure made not the slightest impression on the mind of the poet. So implacable was the anger with which he regarded the destroyer of his villa, that, on being told, as he was expiring, of the prince's having fallen in battle, he declared he could die happy, hearing that that wretch had met with his deserts.

Sanazzaro died in 1532 and was buried in a chapel which he had piously built on the site of his ruined villa.

MARCO GIROLAMO VIDA was born at Cremona towards the end of the fifteenth century. His parents were of noble rank, but possessed so small a fortune, that great praise is ascribed to them for giving their son a liberal

education. His studies were commenced in his native town *, whence he proceeded to Mantua, and was thence, at a proper age, sent to the Universities of Padua and Bologna. How long he remained in those learned seminaries is not known; but he had completed his studies while still a youth, and at the age of twenty entered the Augustine monastery at Mantua. His residence in this monastery was of short duration; he removed to Rome, and became a canon in the congregation of Saint John Lateran.†

Theology, poetry, and philosophy had, from his earliest youth, attracted his regard, and brought all the powers of his mind into action. The verses which he composed while yet a student were remarkable for their sweetness and classical elegance, and his knowledge of the subjects connected with his profession, prepared him for doing credit to its highest offices. Leo the Tenth was now in the full glory of his splendid pontificate; and it was hardly possible that a young man like Vida should remain unnoticed by such a general patron of literary ability.† Leo fixed upon him to carry into execution the wish which he had long formed of having a Latin poem on the history of Christ. Vida, it is said, at first expressed himself fearful of engaging in so important a task; but the Pontiff persisted, and the "Christiad," at one time the most popular of modern Latin productions, was the fruit of his judicious patronage. To the conclusion of the poem a postscript is appended, in which the

* Mantua Virgilio, Vidaque Cremona superbit :
Vates hic Christi, Cæsaris ille fuit.

KLOTZIUS, *Comment. Altenburg.* 1766.

† Opera Omnia, Vita, t. ii.

† The poem on the game of chess is said to have been the first cause of Leo's patronage. — KLOTZ. *Comment.* p. 15.

author thus addresses his reader :—“ Quisquis es, auctor te admonitum vult, &c. “Whoever thou art, the author desires to admonish thee, that he did not venture upon this work from a desire of praise, but in obedience to the will of two supreme Pontiffs, Leo the Tenth and Clement the Seventh, both of the illustrious house of Medici, to whose liberality this age is indebted for the revival of letters and the liberal arts, which before lay extinct. I desired that thou shouldst not be ignorant of this.”* He makes a similar allusion to the same circumstance in his elegant dialogues “De Republica,” composed while he was present at the Council of Trent. In reply to the questions put him by one of the interlocutors, he says :—“I do not deny that I expended a long period, an age almost, in those studies to which I had been devoted from my boyhood ; but it was not so much that I might indulge my own fancy, as that I might obey the will of others. For when I advanced to manhood, I forsook those accomplishments, and gave myself up entirely to philosophy and theology, in the close pursuit of which important studies I went to Rome.”

Through the favour of his patron the Pope, and of his influential and faithful friend Matteo Giberto, he was now enabled to enjoy an elegant retirement in the classic region of Tusculum. There he possessed whatever a man of refined intellect could desire. His solitude was independence of the world rather than a retirement from it. He was not so far from Rome but that he might, whenever he chose, mingle in its learned assemblies ; and while he had his days sufficiently to himself to satisfy a

* “That subject,” says Gravina, “of which Sanazzaro embraced only one part, Girolamo Vida embraced entire.”—*Della Imagin. Poetica*. l. i. n. 78, p. 127

philosopher, they were not too much so to let the poet lose any portion of his kindliness, and susceptibility to friendship. His happiness is thus described in his advice to poets :—

Ne quisdam nisi curarum, liberque laborum
 Inchoet egregium quicquam : verum procul urbis
 Attonitæ fugiat strepitus, et amœna silentis
 Accedat loca ruris, ubi Dryadesque puellæ,
 Panesque, Faunique, et Montivagi Silvani.
 Hic læti haud magnis opibus, non divite cultu,
 Vitam agitant vates ; procul est sceleratus habendi
 Hinc amor, insanæ spes longe, atque impia vota :
 Et nunquam diræ subeunt ea limina curæ,
 Dulcis, et alma quies, ac paucis nota voluptas ! *

Nor let the bard, oppressed with toil or care,
 For high designs his anxious thoughts prepare ;
 But, far removed from cities and their strife,
 First let him seek the joys of rural life,
 And, mid the flowery shades and sylvan bowers,
 Content with little, pass his happy hours.
 Nor pomp be his, nor direful thirst of gain,
 Nor fierce desires, dark cares, nor hopes insane,
 But rest serene and sweet, and pleasures rare,
 Which few can relish and so few can share.

But in the midst of these agreeable pursuits, and while enjoying the tranquil luxuries of his villa, he received intelligence of the sudden death of his parents, who died at Cremona, within a short interval of each other. His affliction at this event was long and deep, and there are few of his productions which appeal more strongly to the feelings than his exquisite Elegy to the Manes of his father and mother. "I was secure and happy," he says ; "I had not attempted in vain the liberal arts ; I had explored the abstruse causes of things, and, in the boldness of youth, had sung a theme on which no one had adventured. Leo read my verses

* *Poetic. lib. i. 487—496.*

with pleasure. I was dear to him, and he loaded me with favours and honours. I was in all things happy. I had nothing to desire. My vows were all answered, and I seemed to touch the height of heaven itself. But lo! the storm howls! the waters are troubled, and I am snatched from the port. Lo! a messenger rushes into my presence, and pierces my ears with the news that both my parents are no more; that first my father, then my mother died!"

The following lines, in which he alludes to the straitened circumstances under which his parents provided for his education, and the delight with which he looked forward to visiting them in the full glow of his success and fame, are exquisitely tender:—

Heu genitor mihi ademte, repens, heu mater ademta !
 Non ego vos posthac, non amplius ora videbo
 Cara. Semel saltem an licuisset utrumque tueri
 Ante obitus, vestraque oculos saturare figura,
 Congressuque frui, farique novissima verba.
 Ah dolor ! ah pietas ! non flens morientia pressi
 Lumina: funereum non sum comitatus honorem.
 Non potui vestro vobis in tempore adesse
 Gratus luce magis, vita jucundior ipsa.
 Non potui vobis spectabilis affulsisse,
 Quum mihi mutato cursu fortuna veniret
 Lætior, et nunquam optatos afferret honores,
 Quos adii vestri tantum memor, haud mihi parcens,
 Cui placitam musis potius traducere vitam
 Fixum erat, atque humilem rerum altas dicere causas.
 Vobis conspicuos unis ingressus honores
 Subdere colla jugo potui male sueta, manusque
 Victus sponte dedi, haud onus aversatus iniquum ;
 Quæ mihi cuncta olim (tibi enim commercia divum)
 Prædixi toties, venturi præscia mater.
 Vos unos agitabam animo, vestraque fruebar
 Lætitia exsultans, et gaudia vestra fovebam,
 Mecum animo versans, quam vobis illa futura
 Læta dies qua me vestris amplexibus urgens
 Irruerem improvisus ad oscula, vix bene utrique
 Agnitus, insolitis titulis, et honoribus auctus

Scilicet, et longo tandem post tempore visus,
 Dum tenuit me Roma, humili vos sede Cremona.
 Una erat hæc merces tantorum digna laborum.
 Mens erat in gremiis studio jacere omnia vestris
 Parta meo, et tantum vestros exponere in usus,
 Ut fuerat par.

My father gone, my tender mother, too !
 No more your forms may meet my longing view.
 Oh! would that Heaven, with less severe decree,
 Once more had given me those loved forms to see ;
 With one long, lingering look to fill my eyes,
 Tell you my love, and catch your latest sighs !
 But 'twas not mine o'er your last looks to bend,
 Nor e'en your funeral honours to attend.
 Dearer to you than life, I stood not by
 To soothe you when the parting hour drew nigh ;
 I came not to you, since with hope elate
 Fortune and fame have changed my poor estate,
 Those gifts bestowed, which, won with studious pain,
 For thy dear sakes I hourly strove to gain,
 And which, fond mother ! from thy prayers above
 Shone in the view of thy prophetic love.
 Sole in my thoughts, what dreams serene and bright
 Have filled my breast with unsubdued delight ;
 That day foreseen, when I, as love should lead,
 Back to your arms with sudden joy should speed,
 And unannounced, with half forgotten face,
 Start to your view, and claim the fond embrace,
 Clothed with new names, and honours gained in Rome,
 Far from Cremona and your humble home.
 This was the only prize for which I wrought,
 This only worthy of my toils I thought,
 Into your laps at last my gains to pour,
 And in your use expend my gathered store.

The loss of his parents was followed by that of his friend and patron Leo X. During the short Pontificate of Adrian VI., he, in common with other men whose elegant taste had recommended them to the former Pope, experienced the pain of comparative neglect. But on the accession of Clement VII., he was again regarded as one of the chief ornaments of the Pontifical Court, and in February 1532, his merits were

rewarded by his promotion to the bishopric of Alba. It was near two years, however, before he left Rome to take possession of his see: he then removed to Alba, and devoted himself with persevering zeal and piety to the duties of his station. Nor was his diocese one which required only the ordinary diligence of a bishop. In the year 1552, the province over which his authority extended was threatened with desolation by the troops under the command of Don Fernando Gonzaga. His letter to that personage affords an excellent proof of the affectionate solicitude with which he watched over the safety of his flock. "It is generally reported in this district," he says, "that your Excellency intends to lead your army against Alba, not simply for the purpose of recovering it, but with the intention of putting the whole of its unfortunate citizens to the sword, as if they were answerable for the loss of the city. I cannot believe that such a thought exists in a mind endowed with so much judgment and discretion; and to which it must be apparent that the only person to be blamed for such disorders is he who ought to have kept the city secure, not the citizens, who dare scarcely breathe. Wherefore, with all the reverence and regard due to your person, as well as to the office which your Excellency holds, I, as bishop of Alba, do hereby protest, in the name of God, that if you should pursue the design of making the innocent suffer for the guilty, neither will you derive honour from such an attempt, nor will the attempt succeed. And if God should have resolved to punish this people for other sins, both mine and theirs, I do yet believe that he will reserve his vengeance for another occasion, and will do so as long as his designs are opposed, the oppressed innocent being the objects of his special care! If the season of the year

were not so unfavourable, and the badness of the weather would allow of my undertaking a journey, with the chance of existing through the way, declining as I am both in age and health, I should not hesitate to approach the walls of Alba with the Imperial army; not, indeed, to preserve those trifles and resources assigned for my support. Then I would willingly sacrifice, with the whole of my bishopric, to save the humblest and most obscure of the citizens, all of whom are my dear children, and are bound to me in love, and in the bowels and the blood of Jesus Christ; but I would do it that, should such a misfortune threaten us, I might die with them; for happily would my spirit pass in company with those afflicted and injured souls to the tribunal of God, there to demand vengeance of the Divine Justice for the innocent blood, on those who had shed it, either by their hands, their counsels, or their orders; it not being right that a pastor should survive his flock so brutally slaughtered. This is a subject which merits a much longer epistle; but I have respect to the sea of occupations which surrounds your excellency, whom God preserve, and, except in this cruelty, prosper. I recommend not myself to you, as is the custom, but the safety of this most innocent people.”*

The answer of Gonzaga was couched in kind and respectful terms. He assured the bishop that the reports which had been circulated were false, and that if he should be obliged to take measures to recover the city, they would be tempered by every consideration of mercy and forbearance. But Vida did not confine himself to exertions of this nature. At the siege of Alba by the French, he strengthened the people by his ex-

* Op. t. ii. pp. 131, 132.

hortations to defend themselves to the last, and out of his own revenues supplied them with whatever was necessary to their support.* In the general management of his flock he was distinguished alike for firmness and kindness; and his letter to the clergy under his charge, written soon after the diocese had been afflicted by the war above alluded to, is an excellent specimen of admonitory eloquence.

Paul III. intended to translate him from the see of Alba to that of Cremona; but the death of the Pontiff prevented the fulfilment of this design, and Vida continued bishop of Alba to the period of his death, which occurred in September 1566. He was buried in his cathedral with great pomp, and a short time after, a magnificent monument was raised to his memory by the people of his native town. Opinions vary respecting the relative merits of Vida's writings; but most persons capable of forming an opinion on the subject, are agreed that his clear and lucid style, the wonderful facility with which he explains the most complicated subjects in classical phrases, and the propriety of his sentiments, place him among the most excellent of the poets who have forsaken their native idiom to describe what they imagined, or felt, in the language of antiquity.

Contemporary with this celebrated man was the scarcely less distinguished GIROLAMO FRACASTORO, who enjoys equal reputation as a poet and a philosopher. He was born of an ancient and noble family at Verona, in the year 1483 †, and it is recorded, as a singular circumstance

* Hieron. Faballi De Vida Oratio.

† Maffei Verona Illustrata. Opera, Ven. 1584.

in the birth of one destined to acquire such reputation for eloquence, that he entered the world with his lips so completely closed, that they had to be separated by a surgical operation. At an early age he evinced a more than ordinary degree of intelligence, and his being preserved uninjured, when his nurse, who was carrying him in her arms, was killed by lightning, inspired his father with an additional hope that he would one day become a distinguished character. No pains or expense, therefore, were spared in his education, and at Padua he fully realised the expectations of his relatives. Mathematics formed the basis of his studies for several years, and under the learned Pomponacio he became profoundly versed in all the branches of that science.

Having thus strengthened his understanding by the severest exercise of its faculties, he next turned his thoughts to the study of medicine, which he commenced and pursued with equally characteristic ardour. His companions in vain endeavoured to keep pace with him, and it was only the oldest and most experienced of the professors who found themselves not rivalled by this prodigy of medical genius. Nor was his progress in natural science the fruit of an undivided attention. Moral philosophy engaged his thoughts at the same time, and at the age of nineteen he was chosen professor of logic.

Unfortunately, as it seemed, for his academical prospects, the alarms of war put a sudden termination to his labours, and he prepared to return to his native town. But when on the point of leaving Padua, an offer was made him of a Professorship in the newly-established University of Pordenone, a town of Friuli. For this promotion he was indebted to the General of the Venetian army, Bartolomeo Alviani, and he enjoyed in Pordenone several years

of uninterrupted tranquillity. It was at this period that he commenced the composition of those works on which his literary reputation is chiefly founded.

The following is a specimen of his versification :

Tu mihi quæ rerum causas, quæ sydera nosis,
 Et cœli effectus varios, atque æris oras
 Urania, (sic dum puro spatiaris Olympo,
 Metirisque vagi lucentes ætheris ignes ;
 Concentu tibi divino cita sydera plaudant),
 Ipsa ades ; et mecum placidas Dea lude per umbras ;
 Dum tenues auræ, dum myrtea sylva canenti
 Aspirat, resonatque cavis Benacus ab antris.

Thou who of things perceiv'st each latent cause,
 The effects of climate and its varying laws,
 Who know'st the stars, and all the realms of air,
 Divine Urania ! to my aid repair, —
 Leave the bright heavens where now thy course is sped,
 While planets roll in concert round thy head,
 And with thy poet track those tranquil shades
 Where softest airs awake the myrtle glades,
 And deep Benacus, as it pours along,
 Sighs 'mid its caves accordant to our song.

But while Fracastoro was pursuing these agreeable studies, the political occurrences of the times, and the mischances suffered by his patron, who was taken prisoner at Ghiaradadda, compelled him to leave Pordenone, and he accordingly retired to the neighbourhood of his native town, where he settled himself in a beautiful villa situated on an eminence overlooking the picturesque shores of the Benacus. According to the description given of this spot by the author of the Latin memoir prefixed to his works, it was well fitted for the elysium of a poet. At some little distance was seen the town of Verona, numerous circumjacent villages spotting the rich intervening meadows covered with flocks and herds. Along the bosom of the river floated vessels of various kinds, their white sails cheerfully glancing in the sun ; while

the hills and glittering promontories were crowned with olive-trees and citrons, and every variety of odorous and fruit-bearing shrubs. The house itself stood sheltered from the winds in a secure retreat, and it was in the delicious quiet of its innermost rooms that Fracastoro was accustomed to receive his few select friends, and enjoy the elegant pleasures of literature and philosophy. These he heightened by all the aids which can be given to such enjoyments by hospitality and a luxurious taste. But Fracastoro had acquired too much reputation for knowledge as a physician, and was too benevolent to remain inactive. His advice was sought by persons from all parts of the country, and no call upon his charity was neglected. Even the Venetians and others experienced the good effects of his skill, when the hostilities in which they were engaged against his country might have furnished him with an excuse for not listening to their appeal. His generosity when such calls were made upon him is worthy of the highest praise. On leaving the residence of the hostile prince or noble, he would receive no reward for the services rendered, but expressed his desire that, if he merited any favour, it might be reserved for his country.*

The celebrity which he thus enjoyed as a physician, added to his reputation for profound scholarship in almost every other branch of learning, pointed him out as a fit person to occupy the eminent station of physician to the Council of Trent, then about to be assembled. In that situation he had full opportunity of displaying to the numerous learned personages by whom he was surrounded, the extraordinary extent and variety of his acquirements. But in the midst of his labours and en-

* Opera, Fracas. Vita.

joyments, he was seized with apoplexy, and died in the month of August, 1553.

PIETRO BEMBO was another of those authors who were mainly indebted in this age, for their rank and celebrity, to classical literature. He was born at Venice in 1470. His father, a patrician, held many important posts under government; and both as a senator and ambassador was distinguished for eminent ability. Pietro enjoyed all the advantages which the most liberal education could bestow. Two years and a half spent at Messina, under the celebrated Costantino Cascari, made him a sound Greek scholar, and four years afterwards spent at Padua, rendered him no less familiar with the circle of the sciences. His father had wished to make him a statesman; but he loved literature and leisure. The Church offered him the only safe retreat from the ambitious views of his family. While still hesitating as to these rival claims, the words "Follow me," heard one day from the altar, struck him with peculiar force. He applied them, and became an ecclesiastic. But it was not till the year 1512 that he reaped any substantial rewards from either his scholarship or profession. At that time he became known, through Giuliano de' Medici, to Pope Julius II. It so happened, that the Pontiff had just received a strange volume from Dacia. No one about his court could interpret it. Bembo read and explained it to his entire satisfaction; and the successful interpreter was rewarded with a rich benefice at Bologna. On the death of Julius, which occurred soon after, the Cardinal de' Medici was elected his successor, and before he left the conclave which had raised him to the throne, he

nominated Bembo, and the no less accomplished Sadoletto, as his joint secretaries.*

Bembo enjoyed the uninterrupted favour of Leo X. At the death of that Pontiff he resolved to bid adieu to courts and public life, and spend the remainder of his days in the full enjoyment of his early tastes. A house at Padua, and a pleasant villa at Villabozza in the neighbourhood, were the chosen scenes of his retirement. The noblest library that could be formed, rare collections of antiquities and works of art, with all the elegancies of wealthy ease, evinced both the taste and riches of the ex-secretary. Venice was proud of his name; and the government formally requested him, in the name of the republic, to write its annals. To this request he acceded; and, taking the commentaries of Cæsar as his model, he spent a large portion of his future life in executing this honourable task.

When Paul III. was about to create a certain number of new cardinals, Bembo enjoyed not only the influence which Venice was allowed to exercise in his behalf, but the powerful recommendation of Cardinal Contarini. No sooner, however, had he actually received the dignity, than many and loud were the murmurs, that his writings breathed more of the spirit of heathen philosophy than of Christian doctrine; and that his conduct was disgraced by many known violations of the laws of both God and the Church.† There was abundant proof of the truth of

* It was Bembo's office to write the secret, or private letters of the Pope. These, it is said, are sealed with wax, while all the other missals of the pontiff are sealed with lead. — Vita, p. 30. *Classic. Ital.* vol. iv.

† Notwithstanding all this, he was even expected to be Pope. Paul III. is reported to have said on first meeting him in Rome "To day we hail the entrance of our successor." — *Sansovino*. This author adds, "that it was because of the sins of the age that such a man was taken away."

these allegations; but it was some extenuation of the faults with which he was charged that he now solemnly devoted himself to the duties of his calling; and, taking priests' orders, resolved to pass the remainder of his time in the study of theology.* Soon after this, the bishopric of Gubbio was conferred upon him, but such was the mistake which he made in seeking the affections of the clergy and people of his diocese, that he soon found himself involved in overwhelming debt. From this embarrassment he was relieved by his translation to the richer see of Bergamo. He accordingly returned to Rome, where he lingered till his death, which occurred in the year 1547.

Cardinal Bembo's reputation was created by the classical elegance of his taste, which, without genius or the higher attributes of mind, made his earliest writings models of correct thought and composition.† His Latinity was considered purer than that of any preceding Italian scholar; and he has been cited as the first successful imitator of Cicero. In his native language he was accounted a second Petrarch; and could he have devoted the whole force of his talents to popular writing, he might have occupied a very high place in the second rank of Italian classics. His powers of mind were not sufficient to raise him above this; and he can hardly be blamed for having exchanged such a moderate degree of pure literary honour for the golden offices and ecclesiastical dignities gained by his learning to write very admirable Latin.

* The vices of Bembo are excused by his Italian biographer on the strange plea, that Leo X. and his court lived magnificently, freely, and without hypocrisy, *sopra tutto senza ipocrisia*.

† "The diversity of Bembo's genius was such that no difficulty could hinder his course. He flew a *briglie sciolte* with equal ease and infinite praise, through the fields of poetry and oratory." — *Seghezzi*.

ARIOSTO.

THE family of Ariosto was settled at Bologna in very remote times, and is said to have sprung from the Aristi, or Aravisti. On the marriage of Lippa Ariosto with Obizzo III., Marquis of Este, that lady, as celebrated for her attachment to her family as for her singular beauty and accomplishments, persuaded most of her relatives to remove with her to Ferrara, where they were established by her influence in many important offices. Niccolò, the father of the poet, after having been employed as ambassador to Rome, and in other high offices, was appointed governor of Reggio. He there married Daria, a lady of the Malaguzzi family, the noblest in Reggio, and on the 8th of September 1474, she gave birth to her first child, the celebrated subject of this memoir.*

Ludovico afforded early indications of genius. His father saw them with delight; but his limited revenues and fortune were barely sufficient to meet the expenses of his station; and when there were nine other children besides Ludovico, he resolved to make him a lawyer, the usual destination of young men of talent, aristocratic descent, and little fortune. When the youthful student entered the university of Padua, or, rather, commenced

* Barotti, *Letterati Ferraresi*. Baruffaldi. Ferrara, 1807.

his professional education at Ferrara*, he was rich in the knowledge of the Latin classics, and had already displayed his skill in oratorical declamations. At the end of five years he had lost so much of his early scholarship that he could scarcely construe the fables of Phædrus. Jurisprudence, or the air of the university, had acted like a blight upon better tastes; and in his utter despair of mastering the law, he had spent the chief part of his time in reading Spanish and French romances.

Niccolò had the prudence to desist from any further attempt to make him a canonist. But his ill-success was long felt as a sore disappointment. Ludovico grieved at his father's vexation. He could not overcome his antipathy to the law, but he resolved to do honour to his name and family by training his mind for the best exercise of its natural powers. In the midst of his studies under the famous Gregorio da Spoleti, and other eminent masters, and just as the hope of success was dawning upon him, he had the misfortune to lose his father. As the eldest of the orphan family, he felt deeply the responsibilities which had fallen upon him, and, though still but twenty years of age, fulfilled his new duties with the prudence of a man long accustomed to domestic cares. A passage in one of his satires, a species of autobiographical sketches, affords a touching account of his feelings under these early trials:—

Mi more il padre, e da Maria† il pensiero
Dietro a Marta bisogna, ch'io rivolga;

* It is doubtful whether he ever studied at Padua. — *Baruffaldi*, lib. i. p. 64. Neither Garofolo nor Pigna makes any mention of his removal to that university. — *Vita*, Venet. 1584.

† Maria and Marta: not sisters of Ariosto, but of Lazarus. — *Baruffaldi*, lib. ii. p. 97.

Ch'io muti in squarci, ed in vacchette Omero :
 Trovi marito, e modo, che si tolga
 Di casa una sorella, e un' altra appresso ;
 E che l'eredità non se ne dolga.
 Coi piccioli fratelli, ai quai successo,
 Era in luogo di padre, far l'ufficio,
 Che debito, e pietà, m'avea commesso.
 A chi studio, a chi corte, a chi esercizio
 Altro procure che nel fin non pieghi.
 Da le virtù il molle animo al vizio.
 Nè questo è solo, ch'a li miei studj nieghi,
 Di più avanzarsi, e basti, che la barca,
 Perchè non torni a dietro, al lito legghi.

My father dies: thenceforth, with care oppressed,
 New thoughts and feelings fill my harassed breast.
 Homer gives way to ledgers, bills and deeds,
 While all a brother's love within me pleads.
 Fit suitors found, two sisters soon are wed,
 And with small portions to the altar led.
 My little brothers next my thoughts engage,
 The whims and wants, and dangers of their age.
 Their father's place I fill, and strive untired,
 To do whate'er that father's love inspired.
 Thus watching how their several wills incline
 In courts, in study, or in arms to shine,
 No toil I shun their fair pursuits to aid,
 Still of the snares that strew their path afraid :
 Nor this alone : though press we quick to land,
 The bark's not safe till fastened to the strand.

A dear friend and kinsman, Pandolfo, saw with admiration the watchfulness which he displayed in the guardianship of his brothers and sisters. But he wished him at the same time to resume his studies; and at the earnest desire of this affectionate counsellor, he once more turned to his Greek and Latin, and took up his pen to try the vigour of his reviving fancy. The death of Pandolfo was another heavy trial; but the necessities of his position now obliged him to look for the usual supports of genius; and though he ungraciously spoke of it as a new affliction, he was very glad to accept

the offer of patronage made him by the Cardinal Ippolito d'Este.

Hating as he did the yoke to which he was thus subjected, he could not be blind to the advantages afforded him in the palace of the princely cardinal. He there met and conversed with a succession of visitors, celebrated for every species of talent and accomplishment. From the most enlightened of these he derived the encouragement which he needed to commence some work worthy of his talents. But it was difficult to find a subject which should combine the two supposed essentials to success. It must satisfy his own taste, but it must also afford ample scope and occasion for his satisfying the family pride of the house of Este. Thus, at first, he proposed to take, as the groundwork of his poem, the career of Obizzo, a young warrior of that family, and who had greatly distinguished himself in the battles fought between Philip-le-bel, and Edward of England. He even commenced a poem on the subject, and made his experiment in the terza rima of Dante. But neither the theme nor the verse pleased him; and he ultimately determined to take up the unfinished story of Boiardo's Orlando. This was a happy thought. He was deeply versed in the study of old romance.* Not a tradition of chivalry, no stirring or pathetic tale of the crusades, had escaped his inquiry. The darkest pages of witchcraft and necromancy were familiar to him; and nothing was needed but the clue to some subject on which all this curious learning might be employed. That clue, when found, led him to the adventures of Orlando; and Ariosto, delighted, saw at a glance how the track thus opened

* Ha tutta la romanzeria nel mondo cercato. — *Gio. Pigna-La Vita*. 1584.

to him might be pursued through endless windings, with a never-ceasing variety of scenes and incidents.* No less happy was he in the choice of his stanza. Flexible to all moods of thought, it leaves the writer free to wander as he will from the severest to the gayest theme. It may be made to serve either extreme; while its easy flow gives a pleasant musical tone to the most ordinary phrases that can be adapted to its rhythm. An amusing anecdote is told of Ariosto's correspondence with Bembo on this subject. "Put your romance," was the cardinal's grave advice, "into good Latin hexameters, and you will immortalise your name." "I have no wish," was Ariosto's reply, "to be a second-rate writer in Latin, while I may be one of the first in Italian." How different a fate would have attended the "Orlando Furioso" had the erudite taste of Bembo prevailed over the instincts of the poet!

But in the midst of his new and fascinating employment, he was painfully reminded that his time and talents had been devoted to the service of a patron. The Duke of Ferrara, Ippolito's brother, knew Ariosto's worth, and duly appreciated his genius. Vexatious as it was to the poet to be interrupted just as his design had dawned upon him, Alfonso deserved praise for employing him only in the most honourable capacity. Julius II., that most restless and warlike of Pontiffs, had threatened Ferrara with his speedy vengeance. Ariosto listened to the duke's entreaties, and representations of his policy,

* "First, it is necessary for any one who would understand the 'Orlando Furioso,' that he read all the three books of the 'Orlando Innamorato' of the Count Matteo Maria Boiardo; for Ariosto follows these three books, and the greater part of the things read in the Furioso, are commenced in them."—*Ruscelli. Annot. p. 602. ed. Venet. 1587.*

† Giovan. Pigna. Venet. 1584; Baruffaldi, lib. ii. p. 131.

and, armed with due authority, appeared at Rome as the ambassador of Ferrara. His name and accomplishments were well known at the papal court. Julius seemed moved by his address, and dismissed him with an answer, which led Alfonso to hope that the threatened danger was past. The appearance of a formidable army composed of Papal and Venetian forces soon proved the delusiveness of this hope. Preparations had been made at Ferrara for such a juncture, and the invaders were boldly and successfully repulsed. This victory of Pollicella was long renowned. Ariosto enjoyed the uncertain fame of sharing in the triumph. But if he had ever any right to warlike renown, it was gained at an earlier date, and was not sufficient to overcome his natural dislike to a military career. On his return from Rome he found Ferrara in a state of strange agitation. The popular rejoicings were mingled with expressions of terror. Julius, infuriated by the defeat of his armament, had hurled his anathemas against Ferrara, and was preparing to enforce them with overwhelming power. Who would venture to Rome, in this case, or dare to represent the princes, trembling at the consequences of their victory? The question was put to one courtier after another. All grew pale at the name of Julius. Ariosto alone had the courage to accept again the office of envoy. When he arrived at Rome, the Pope had retired to a neighbouring villa.* He prepared to follow him; but it was gently whispered in his ear, that Julius had resolved, if he came within his reach, to sink him in the Tiber. The poet had not sufficient fortitude to encounter such a fate, and was thankful to reach Ferrara in safety.

Rome soon after presented a very different prospect to

* Pigna. Garofolo.

the ardent and hopeful imagination of literary men. Julius was succeeded by Leo X., who, with others of his family, had often expressed great admiration of Ariosto's talents. Friends and relatives united in urging him to cast himself at the feet of the new pontiff without delay. Though not quite so confident of the result as these anxious advisers, Ariosto had his secret hopes of rich offices, of revenues to be derived from benefices without cure of souls, or, at least, of golden promises, making bright the prospect of the future. When he actually stood in the presence of the pontiff, all, at first, seemed likely to be realised. Leo took him by the hand, kissed him both on the right cheek and the left, and dismissed him with the blandest looks and words. But by some unaccountable inward misgiving, Ariosto felt that this vain show of affection was all he would ever receive from Leo. He judged aright; and yielding at once to mingled pride and disappointment, he hastened out of Rome, and hurried in a drenching rain to Montone, where, wet to the skin, he arrived late at night, but thankful to find an inn where he could have his supper and a bed.*

The midsummer festivals at Florence tempted him to delay his return to Ferrara. Some of his biographers speak of his spending several months there in apparent oblivion of his masters, the duke and the cardinal. He may, possibly, have sought a release from his engagement to these patrons on looking to Rome for a more honourable support. If such were the case, he would now feel at liberty to avail himself of all the advantages offered by

* Indi col seno e colla falda piena
Di spene, ma di fango molle e brutto
La notte andai sin al Montone a cena.

SATIR. IV., *ad Annibale Mallaguzzo.*

Florence, as the acknowledged mother and nurse of the purest Italian diction. But whether he remained there many months, or only a few weeks, it was a period to him of great enjoyment. He delighted in the contemplation of gorgeous spectacles. His friend, Niccolò Vespucci, entertained him with affectionate hospitality; and, above all, his host had residing with him, at this time, a near relative, the beautiful widow Alessandra, the last, and only known possessor of Ariosto's heart.

The temporary liberty which he enjoyed, whether at Florence or Ferrara, enabled him to make considerable progress with his poem. In the year 1515 it was sufficiently advanced to encourage him in sending it to the press. He had far too strict a taste, not to feel, that it must undergo numberless changes before it assumed the form which he hoped finally to give it. But he longed for the opinion of the public. He was risking on the experiment of this poem, the best years of his life. The subject had taken fast hold of his mind, and, should it prove a failure, it would require a very vigorous effort to enable him now to exchange it for any other.

This might be a sufficient excuse for the first rough and imperfect edition of the poem. The admiration which it excited was a still better apology for its appearance. Ariosto's friends boasted aloud of their foresight in urging him to the undertaking. There was, however, one notable exception to this kindly feeling. Cardinal Ippolito accepted the copy presented to him by the author in person: turned over some few pages of the volume; read a passage here and there; and then, looking the poet full in the face, coldly asked him, where he had contrived to collect such a mass of fooleries?

We are not told what answer Ariosto returned to this gracious inquiry; but he had soon after an opportunity

of showing how little he relished serving such a patron. Were it possible, in nature, that a dignified churchman could be so affected, the cardinal would have felt himself surfeited with benefices. He had been nominated, when only seven years of age, to the archbishopric of Strigonia, afterwards exchanged for Agria, in Hungary. At thirteen, he was elected a cardinal by Alexander VI.; and, in addition to these dignities, he held the bishoprics of Modena and Ferrara, the abbeys of Fellonia, Pomposa, Brescello, Nonantola, Gavello, and numerous livings; the collected income amounting, in our money, to about 50,000*l.* per annum.

There is some difference of opinion as to the intellectual tastes of this insolent and bloated dignitary*; but no evidence exists to disprove his base disposition and immoralities. One act only of his life would be sufficient to stamp his memory with infamy. He had a natural brother, Giulio, a young man of great accomplishments, and beloved for his popular and amiable manners. His addresses had been received by one of the maids of honour; their mutual affection was generally known, and no obstacle existed to their union. But the cardinal looked with hate and jealousy on Giulio's approaching happiness. He thought that his dignity and wealth might lure his brother's intended wife to become his mistress. The haughty and insulted girl treated his advances with scornful ridicule. Unhappily for her lover, among other bitter sayings, she declared, that Giulio's beautiful eyes were worth more than the whole of the cardinal's sacred person, even with the addition of his benefices.

Not many days after this conversation, Giulio and

* Baruffaldi, *Vita*, lib. ii. p. 125.

Ippolito were hunting together in a neighbouring forest. In the course of the chase, Giulio found himself separated from his followers, and immediately after surrounded by a band of hired ruffians, who, pulling him from his horse, attempted to tear out his eyes, and left him bleeding on the ground. This barbarous deed inspired the prince Ferrante, another brother, with irrepressible indignation. Some of the courtiers, and a body of discontented citizens, readily listened to his suggestions of revenge. As soon as Giulio was partially recovered, he was called upon to head a troop of conspirators, prepared to expel both the duke and the cardinal from Ferrara.* But the plot had been discovered. The inferior agents in the design were punished according to their various degrees of guilt, and Ferrante and Giulio, became the tenants of a prison, where the former died after a confinement of thirty-four years, and from which the latter came forth dressed in the old costume of his youth, and seated on horseback, after an imprisonment of more than half a century.

Ariosto's father was a courtier, and he himself had been nurtured from boyhood within the precincts of a palace, and taught dependence on the smiles of its inmates. It is not likely, therefore, that he made any very curious inquiries into events of this kind, or felt much desire to estimate with scrupulous nicety the character of his patrons. But it is certain that he only served them from necessity. He had no love for them; and on the first chafing of the yoke somewhat more roughly than usual, he threw it off, even at the risk of penury.

The cardinal was obliged, from time to time, to visit his diocese in Hungary. He travelled on these occasions

* Guicciardini, *Ist.*, lib. vi. An. 1505. Muratori, *Antichità Estens*, pt. ii. c. xi. p. 280.

with great pomp; and loved to increase his state by carrying in his train men of learning and ability. Ariosto was summoned to attend him as a matter of course; but Ariosto, in this case, had a will of his own; he would, on no account, go to Hungary. His health, he pleaded, would inevitably fail in the cold, foggy airs of the North. It would be impossible for him to breathe in rooms heated by German stoves. The cookery of the Hungarians was the very reverse of that fitted to his delicate stomach; and the drinking-bouts, in which he must necessarily share, as a follower of the cardinal, would bring destruction both on his mind and body. To these considerations were added others derived from the infirmities of his aged mother, and the general condition of the family; and he concluded by telling his brother, who was very well pleased to attend the cardinal, that if his eminence would accept his apology, he would trumpet his praise at home to the very skies.*

However ingeniously he may have urged these excuses, or more seriously pleaded his readiness to sacrifice wealth, and every object of worldly ambition, to the enjoyment of learned leisure, his arguments produced no effect on the mind of the cardinal. He denounced such conduct as treason to all the laws and rights of patronage. It seemed past belief that a servant of the princes of Este should think of balancing his ease, his tastes, or even his health against their sovereign claim to his obe-

* Io stando quì farò con chiara tromba
Il suo nome sonar forse tanto alto
Che tanto mai non s'ì levò colomba.

SATIRE II., *ad Alessandro Ariosto.*

I resting here the clarion's voice will raise,
And make the welkin echo with his praise
Higher than bird can soar.

dience. But so it was. Ariosto remained firm to his purpose. He had even the temerity to laugh at the means necessary to his escape, and told the story of an ass who had stolen into a granary, and grown so puffy, that he remained a prisoner, till a rat advised him to disgorge his ill-gotten food, and become himself again. A bitter sarcasm lay concealed in this comparison. The cardinal's liberality was in no wise proportioned to his tyranny.* Ariosto had only some few crowns a month, and a small allowance from the chancery of Milan, to support his appearance at court. He was never likely to grow fat on such an income, and hence his declaration that he would consider it no hardship to resign all the cardinal's gifts, to recover his early liberty : —

Or conchiudendo dico : che se 'l sacro
Cardinal comperato avermi stima
Con li suoi doni, non mi è acerbo et acro
Renderli, e tor la libertà mia prima.

Now if the sacred cardinal believe
That he has bought me with his gifts, no sore
Complaint I make, if he will back receive
His gifts, and me my liberty restore.

Ariosto, however, had occasion for a full trial of the sweets of independence and literature. He possessed barely sufficient to supply his ordinary wants. It is to this period, therefore, that we should be disposed to assign his sojourn at Reggio. Certain it is, that either now, or at some earlier season, he passed several months in the house of a relation at S. Maurizio.† Whenever it was, it proved to him a season of renovating repose

* Tiraboschi is opposed to most Italian writers on the conduct of the cardinal. He asserts both his liberality and his sound judgment.—*Storia*, t. vii. lib. i. p. 43, lib. iii. p. 1235.

† Baruffaldi, lib. ii. p. 102.

and comfort. He spoke of it long after, as one of the pleasantest of all pleasant subjects for recollection : —

Già mi fur' dolci inviti a empir le carte
 I luoghi ameni, di che il nostro Rheggio
 E 'l nato nido mio n' ha la sua parte :
 Il tao Mauritian sempre vagheggio
 La bella stanza, e 'l Rodano vicino,
 Da le Naiade amato ombroso seggio :
 Il lucido vivaio, onde il giardino
 Si cinge intorno, il fresco rio che corre
 Rigando l' erbe, ove poi fa il molino.
 Non mi si po de la memoria torre
 Le vigna, e i solchi del fecondo Iacco,
 Le valle e l' colle, e la ben posta torre.

Time was when rural solitude inclined
 The storied page to fill with ready mind.
 Dear then those scenes; — our Reggio's old domain,
 My native nest, not claimed or sought in vain:
 My friend's fair villa, and the neighbouring Rhone,
 Whose banks the Naiads haunt, serene and lone :
 The lucid pool, whence small fresh streams distil,
 That glad the garden round, and turn the mill;—
 Yet memory loves upon these scenes to dwell,
 Yet sees the vines with fruit delicious swell :
 Luxurious meadows blooming spread around,
 Low winding vales, and hills with turrets crowned.

Cardinal Ippolito died on his way from Hungary. This event produced another change in the fortunes of Ariosto. The duke had felt some doubt as to the propriety of showing favour to the poet in his brother's despite. But this obstacle to his kindly sentiments was now removed ; and he directed that Ariosto's name should again be placed on the list of court stipendiaries.* The salary appointed him was seven scudi, or twenty-one lire a month, equivalent to about thirty-eight shillings.

* A memorandum to this effect, written in the duke's own hand, is preserved in the ducal archives of Modena, stating the sum to be allowed Ariosto. — *Baruffaldi, Antonio Butio*, Document xxi. p. 292.

To this was added an allowance for three domestics, and two horses. Considering the different value of money, and the very limited finances of Alphonso, there was no want of generosity in this arrangement. Ariosto, for a time, found himself free from pressing care, and contrived to save enough, out of his moderate resources, to purchase a piece of ground near the church of S. Benedetto, and build a small house in the midst of a spacious garden, the pride and delight of his latter days.

But his tranquillity was not of long continuance. The ducal treasury had seasons of exhaustion, and the courtiers, of whatever rank, occasionally remained penniless. Ariosto's troubles from this cause were greatly increased by an unhappy law-suit. His relative, the Count Rinaldo, died, leaving no children. Ariosto and his brothers immediately laid claim to the ancient family estate of La Bella Tenuta. They were opposed by a convent of Minor Friars, on the plea that they had a right to the property, one of their brethren being an Ariosto, and nearly allied to the deceased. To complicate the matter still further, the hungry Camera Ducale started a new claim to the estate. The judge appointed to try the cause, Alfonsino Trotto, had suffered from Ariosto's satires, and was himself a courtier. Little doubt existed as to the sentence which he would pronounce. The estate was declared public property. But one appeal after another was made from this decision, and the poet died long before the final settlement of the dispute.

Harassed by these proceedings and straitened in circumstances, Ariosto could not conceal his discontent. It would have been difficult for the duke to find means of removing it, had not the turbulent district of Garfagnana demanded the presence of some wise and experienced governor. Uncongenial as such an appointment might seem to a man of Ariosto's tastes, the duke desired him

to accept it as the best, or only present means of improving his condition. The event is thus described in the fourth satire:—

Ricorsi al Duca, o voi signor levarmi
Dovete di bisogno, o non v' incresca,
Ch' io vada altra pastura a procacciarmi.
Garfagnini in quel tempo, essendo fresca
La lor revoluzione, che spinto fuori
Avean Marzocco a procacciar d' altr' esca.
Con lettere frequenti, e ambasciatori
Replicavano al Duca, e facean fretta
D'aver lor capi, e loro usati onori.
Fu di me fatta una improvvisa eletta.
O fosse, perchè il termine era breve
Di consigliar chi pel miglior si metta:
O pur fu appresso il mio signor più leve
Il bisogno de' sudditi, che 'l mio,
Di ch' obbligo gli ho, quanto se gli deve.
Obbligo gli ho del buon voler, più ch' io
Mi contenti del dono, il quale è grande,
Ma non molto conforme al mio desio.

Compelled at length, I next the duke addressed,—
Or aid me now, or, thus with want oppressed,
Let me depart elsewhere to seek relief.
Just then, Marzocco, Garfagnana's chief,
Expelled his state, had left the people free
To choose their prince, and better laws decree.
Anxious to gain the duke's support, they send
Ambassadors and letters without end.
And thus importunate they still implore
That he the rule would take, and peace restore.
He yields, and calls me to the post, but why?
'Twere hard, I own, to give a clear reply:
From haste, perchance,—perchance from greater zeal
To seek his servant's than his people's weal,—
Whate'er the cause, I thank him as I ought;
The kindness great, though small the good it wrought.

The poet was, probably, not so unfitted for the appointment as he imagined. His generous disposition, his enjoyment of romantic scenes and incidents, and strong sense of justice, were characteristics eminently calculated to make him both happy and useful among the Garfagnani.

The measures which he took to restore tranquillity proved successful. His prudence and firmness secured him the respect, and his hearty, affectionate disposition, the love of the people. Even the most lawless offered their tribute to his fame. Having to pass one day over a wild part of the country, he came upon the borders of a forest, well known as the resort of banditti, led by the celebrated chiefs, Dominico Marocco and Filippo Pachione. Scarcely had he reached the skirts of the wood, when a formidable body of armed horsemen crossed the path, and carefully scrutinised his person. His attendants were few, and could ill conceal their alarm. One of them had loitered behind. Before he could rejoin his party, the leader of the strangers rode up to him, and inquired the name of his master. "It is Ariosto," was the reply; "And I am Filippo Pachione," rejoined the robber. Then spurring his horse forward and taking off his hat, he approached Ariosto, and gracefully apologised for having suffered so great a man to pass him unsaluted.*

Another story of the same kind is told by Baretta. Ariosto having, one morning, risen very early, rambled in his dressing-gown beyond the walls, and over the drawbridge, of the castle. Charmed by the beauty of the country, and his own fancies, he continued to walk on, when he was suddenly surrounded by a number of men, whose countenances gave evident proofs of their design. One of them, happily, recognised his person. "It is Ariosto!" he exclaimed. The name acted as a charm upon the robbers, and they respectfully escorted him back to the castle, showing at least as much reverence for the poet as the governor, by reciting, as they went, the most favourite passages of his poem.

* Garofolo, *Vita*. Orlando Furioso. Ed. Venet. 1584.

While at Garfagnana, Ariosto received several letters from his friend Pistofolo. They informed him that the duke was anxious to secure his services as ambassador to the court of the Pope. But he was now sighing for his home, and for that tranquil, unambitious, independence which he had felt, even in his early years, was the best nurse of literary genius. Having, therefore, honourably completed his three years in the government of Garfagnana, he returned to Ferrara, and enlarging his garden-house into a tolerable residence, gathered his books and papers around him, invited two of his unmarried sisters to share his comforts, and, after a brief interval, brought home a wife. Both the name of the lady, and the marriage itself, are matter of dispute. Ariosto enjoyed, like other eminent men of those times, a nondescript species of clericy. Hence the tithes of a benefice, vacated in his favour by an old clergyman*, became his; and he had a small revenue from other ecclesiastical sources. This kind of connection with the Church was not sufficient to disturb a man of ordinary conscience, when he proposed to marry, but it was of such a nature that, if he depended upon the funds of the Church, prudence taught him to risk the character of himself and wife, in after times, rather than proclaim, in his own, the real legitimacy of their union.† The amiable and beautiful widow Alessandra, the relation of his Florentine friend Vespucci, has the best apparent claim to the title of Ariosto's wife,

* The aged rector of Sant' Agata, who thought that he should be murdered by some eager expectant of the next incumbency. Wherefore, says Ariosto,

. . . mi levò in collo sì gran peso.—*Sat.* iii.

† His conduct bears a very favourable interpretation when compared with that of Cardinal Bembo.—PANIZZI, *Ariosto*. Ed. 1830, vol. vi. p. lxxxii. note.

His first and most anxious care, on thus finding himself settled in a home, was the preparation of a new edition of the *Orlando*. The poem, in its author's estimation, was still unfinished, and his confidence in himself had been little increased, either by years or practice. Several editions had already appeared. The first in 1515, the second the following year, and the third in 1521; all printed at Ferrara. In 1526, a fourth appeared at Milan; and two others at Venice, the last in 1530. None of these editions extend beyond forty cantos. Six were subsequently composed. The value of this addition has been questioned. Not so the importance of the numerous abridgments and corrections which Ariosto, bitterly lamenting his early licentiousness of style, had prepared, not long before his death, for a further reprint.*

The last edition, published during his life, appeared in 1532. His anxiety on this occasion was scarcely less than that which he felt on the first appearance of the poem seventeen years before. It was with something like agony, therefore, that he discovered numberless instances of typographical errors, as so many sets-off to his own critical and sleepless care. "The printer has assassinated me!" was his mournful exclamation.†

* Ruscelli gives an interesting account of his examination of the copy corrected by Ariosto himself, and shown him by Galasso Ariosto, the poet's brother. It was a copy of the last edition, roughly bound in paper, and uncut at the edges, so that the margin might not be lessened. There were also several sheets of paper covered with notes, partly in Ariosto's own hand, and partly in other hands. — *Annot. to edit.* Venet. 1587, p. 615. Panizzi happily says on this subject, "We have therefore as good an evidence as could be wished that Ariosto, in his maturer years, was ashamed of having indulged in language or images of an improper character, and that had he not been prevented by death, he would have altered such parts of his work." — *Orlando Furioso*. Ed. 1830. *Life*, p. 152.

† The edition thus published was assigned to the bookseller, Giacomo Gigli, on the following terms: he was to pay at the rate of sixty lire, or about twenty scudi, for every hundred copies, and was

Greatly as these anxieties disturbed his repose, the concluding period of Ariosto's life was, on the whole, serene and happy. His reputation brought him an increase of revenue. The friendly duke sent him on a mission to the Marquis del Vasto, commander of the imperial forces at Correggio, and he received the grant of a pension of a hundred golden ducats, payable by the court of Vienna. His friends loved him, and courted his society, and his two sons, their mother unknown, rewarded his fostering care by their virtues and filial affection. Virginio, the elder of the two, became a priest, and obtained considerable preferment. The other entered the army, but died young. Some biographical notes, written by the former, afford affecting evidence of the tenderness with which he observed his father's habits of life and daily labours. It was on sending this young man to the university of Padua, that Ariosto addressed his well-known satire to Cardinal Bembo. "Find," he said, "a tutor for my son; let him be a scholar, able to make him understand Homer, Appollonius, Euripides, and the other poets of Greece; but let him also be a man free from the vices of the age." "I have myself," he adds, "taught my son to read Virgil, Terence, Ovid, Horace, and Plautus, but I am now too idle, or too weak, to open the temple of Apollo in Delos, as I opened that of the muses on the Roman Palatine." Then alluding to the difficulties and dangers of his own early years, he concludes:—

Dottrina abbia, e bontà, ma principale
Sia la bontà, che non vi essendo questa
Nè molto quella a la mia stima vale.
So ben, che la dottrina fia più presta
A lasciarsi trovar, che la bontade.

bound not to sell any at a higher price than sixteen sous. Ariosto, on his part, agreed to sell none except through Gigli. Baruffaldi speaks of this as a hard bargain for the poet. — *Vita*, p. 186.

Knowledge and virtue,—these be all his aim,
But first and chief let Virtue homage claim;
Without her, little should I care to find
Knowledge, far easier gained, enrich his mind.

Among the lighter employments of Ariosto's declining years, the pleasantest were those derived from the care of his house and garden. Both were the objects of his pride, but both, like his poem, were subjected to perpetual alterations. Over his door was the inscription:—

*Parva sed apta mihi, sed nulli obnoxia, sed non
Sordida, parva meo sed tamen ære domus.*

In spite of this assertion that the abode was so fit for him, he used to lament that he could not change the arrangement of the rooms as easily as he could remodel a canto of the Orlando. Some friend, on one occasion, had the imprudence to assent to his criticism on the plan of the villa, and asked how it was that he, who could so well describe castles and palaces, had constructed so poor a residence for himself. "Ah!" exclaimed the discontented poet, "bricks and mortar cost me money; verses I make for nothing."

His skill in gardening was as little as in architecture, but in neither case did the enjoyment of his toils and speculations suffer loss by the want of profitable results. "In gardening," says his son Virginio, "he pursued the same course as with his verses, never leaving anything in the same place more than three months. If he planted a fruit-tree, or sowed seed of any kind, he would examine it so often to see if it were growing, that he generally ended with breaking off the bud, or early shoot. Knowing but little of flowers, he often mistook one for the other, and would watch weeds with the greatest care, till compelled to acknowledge his error. I remember he once

sowed some caper-seed. Every day he anxiously went to see what progress the capers were making. In a short time he came to tell us that they grew extraordinarily well. His delight led us to visit the capers ourselves. No capers, however, were visible. He had mistaken for capers a precocious young elder-bush."

The Duke Alphonso's esteem for Ariosto increased with years. He no longer contemplated employing him on embassies to foreign courts, or in the government of provinces. But respect for his fame and character made him anxious to raise him above the station of a mere courtier or pensioner. The growing taste for theatrical performances afforded him the opportunity of accomplishing his wish. Leo X. had given a new dignity to dramatic literature, and Ariosto's early productions, the "Cassaria," and "I Suppositi," were not forgotten by the admirers of his matured genius. Alphonso resolved to take advantage of his talents to supply Ferrara with a fresh source of amusement. He engaged him to plan a theatre, and supply it with pieces for representation from his own pen. The theatre was built; plays were written and arranged by Ariosto, and Alphonso delighted in the complete success of his experiment.

But in the spring of the year 1533 the health of the poet began rapidly to decline. He was afflicted with asthma and indigestion. The latter disorder is said to have been brought on by his rapid and careless mode of eating. So little heed did he take of the viands set before him, that his friends sometimes amused themselves with seeing him uninquiringly swallow the coarsest fare jestingly put in the place of an expected delicacy. In the same way, though thoroughly hospitable, he would allow a too modest guest to sit at his table fast-

ing, while he himself indulged his appetite with whatever the servants brought.

Blame is attached to the physicians for not understanding the real nature of his disorders. He lingered till the 6th of June. His death occurred during the night, a few hours after Alphonso's magnificent theatre had been totally consumed by fire.

He had expressed a wish to be buried in the neighbouring church of S. Benedetto, and with great privacy.* The funeral took place at night. Two torch-bearers, and a few attendants assembled round the bier; but the party was suddenly increased. Several monks of S. Benedetto overstepped the rules of their order, and showed

* His independence of the feelings which prompt men to the love of sepulchral honours is significantly shown in the Latin epitaph which he wrote for himself, and which is well known to English readers by Pope's imitation:—

Ludovici Areosti humanantur ossa
Sub hoc marmore, seu sub hac humo, seu
Sub quidquid voluit benignus hæres,
Sive hærede benignior comes, sive
Opportunius incidens viator
Nam scire hand potuit futura, sed nec
Tanti erat vacuum sibi cadaver
Ut urnam cuperet parare vivens, &c.

Pope adopted this under the title of an epitaph "For one who would not be buried in Westminster Abbey," humorously alluding to his known exclusion as a Roman Catholic:—

Under this marble, or under this sill,
Or under this turf, or e'en what they will,
Whatever an heir, or a friend in his stead,
Or any good creature shall lay o'er my head,
Lies one who ne'er cared, and still cares not a pin
What they say, or may say of the mortal within,
But who living and dying, serene, still and free,
Trusts in God that as well as he was he shall be.

Dr. Johnson objects, that when a man is once buried, the question under what he is buried is easily decided.—*Life of Pope.*

the love which they had felt for their late neighbour by following him as mourners to the grave.

Virginio, not content with his father's humble tomb in S. Benedetto, raised a mausoleum to his memory in his favourite garden. Thither also he wished to transfer his remains, but the good monks remonstrated and resisted with so much earnestness, that Virginio ceased from his design. When the church, long after, was rebuilt, Agostino Mosti, a gentleman of Ferrara, marked the poet's new grave by a monument expressive of the homage due to his genius; but in 1612 the great-grandson of Ariosto again removed his ashes, and erected over them a tomb of costly marble, bearing a long and elaborate inscription.*

Of the general character of this great poet, a sufficient notion may be formed from the commonly known incidents of his life, and the sentiments interspersed through his works. These show us that, till near the end of his days, he shared largely in the licentious habits of the age. But they also show us, that he was fondly solicitous for the welfare of his friends, that he cherished a noble spirit of independence, and was equally eminent in all the walks of public life for justice and benevolence.

In person, Ariosto was grave and majestic. Slightly stooping as he walked, his slow and measured step gave him the appearance of a person habitually engaged in contemplation. His pale, thin cheeks, and lofty forehead seemed lit up by the lustre of his black, penetrating eyes; while the generally severe expression of his visage was softened by the singular beauty of his lips.

Few works have been submitted to severer criticism

* The expression, "*A Carolo V. Casare, coronato,*" occurs in this inscription; but it is generally denied that Ariosto received the laurel crown either from Charles or any other prince. He would probably have shrunk from the ceremony which delighted Petrarch.

than the Orlando Furioso; few, if any have enjoyed a greater popularity. Bernardo Tasso, in a letter to Varchi, says that, in his time, there was not "an artisan, not a boy, girl, or old man, who had not read it again and again; that the lonely traveller relieved the toil of his cold and weary journey by singing its stanzas, and that persons of all classes might be heard repeating them in the streets and fields."

But two great objections have been urged with considerable force against the unqualified praise heaped on Ariosto. The latitude which he allowed himself in some of his descriptions is a cause of vexation even to his most ardent admirers. He felt the shame due to such blots upon the fair character of literature, and made an effort, but too late, to remove the stain. His other fault arises simply from the mechanism of his poem. It is utterly wanting in compactness of design, — a defect invariably discovered in works which have no epic or dramatic moral. Whenever the imagination of an author outstrips his ethical feeling of the subject, or fable, on which he is employed, we may be soothed and charmed, and wrapt in pleasant reveries by the magic of his song; but we shall feel that the creations of fancy are, in this case, unsubstantial, and that they are not so when we read the Iliad, or Lear, or Macbeth, or look on some painting from the hand of a great master.

In the celebrated dispute, commenced shortly after the publication of the "*Gerusalemme liberata*," between the distinguished Italian critics, Pellegrino and Salviati, the respective merits of Ariosto and Tasso were canvassed with a warmth and display of learning rarely witnessed even in literary controversies. No decision can ever be arrived at on such a question. The admirers of Ariosto will never allow that it would have been well for him

to fetter his brilliant genius, rejoicing like a child in its feeling of health and activity. As little will the admirers of Tasso, calm, majestic, and meditative, wish that he had disregarded the rules of his art, and allowed his fancy to wanton in unlicensed liberty.

The dramas written by Ariosto, are mainly adaptations from classical models. Though marked by many traits of genius, they excite little interest in modern readers. His satires, on the contrary, are characterised by that humour, good sense, and appeals to every-day sympathy, which ought to render them even still popular.

PIETRO ARETINO.

THIS celebrated satirist, more feared in his time than conquerors or kings, only shared with better poets the title of "divine," but stood alone as "the scourge of princes." It would be difficult to find a more unintelligible subject for literary biography than Pietro Aretino. Sovereigns, churchmen of highest rank, nobles of every degree, made him their friend, and filled his purse with gold. His name, on the other hand, has been branded with infamy as that of the basest of flatterers, and lowest slave of worldly vice. He was born at Arezzo, on the 19th or 20th of April, 1492; or, as his Italian biographers express it, in the night between those days. His father was a gentleman, Luigi Bacci; all that we know of his mother is that her name was Tita. He went to school, but for a short time only. "I had no more learning," he says, in after life, "than what just sufficed to instruct me how to cross myself."* A poor, neglected child was Pietro Aretino. In the rough, premature trials of his boyhood, he acquired those habits of self-dependence which eventually enabled him to subject the pride and vanity of the world to his own personal aggrandisement. Latin and Greek, the favourite

* *Lettere*, lib. i. p. 199.

studies of well-educated youths, remained to him unknown. But he was master of his mother-tongue, and this afforded him access to sources of knowledge more available than any other for his immediate improvement. He read incessantly the best writers of Italy. They taught him how to express his own fervent, impatient thoughts. He became a poet, a satirist,—a satirist because he felt himself cruelly neglected, — left unloved and untaught, when he most thirsted for knowledge and affection. Many must have been the objects of his sarcasm before he turned it against the religious practices of his townspeople. A sonnet in ridicule of indulgences was the result of more than mere boyish ill-humour. Its insulting character provoked corresponding indignation ; and Pietro thought it prudent to bid a hasty farewell to the city of his birth.

Unfriended and moneyless, he found refuge in Perugia. A book-binder received him into his employ. He liked the business, became a skilful workman, and though his wages still left him poor, he remained, for some years, contented and happy. His employment afforded him frequent opportunities of conversing with men of letters, and there was an inestimable advantage in the privilege of reading, though always in haste, and sometimes by stealth, the numerous works which passed through his hands.

But Aretino's ambition increased with his knowledge. He was happy as a book-binder. Perugia had cherished him with a kindliness strangely different to the unloving harshness of Arezzo. Hence he called it his own land*, the garden of his youth.† But there is a subtle distinc-

* *Lettere di Pietro Aretino. Parigi, 1609. Lib. ii. p. 146.*

† *Ibid., lib. i. p. 49.*

tion between happiness and contentedness. Perugia afforded him more comfort than he ever after enjoyed. Wise men and good men are satisfied with such an amount of enjoyment, and set ambition at defiance. But Pietro Aretino was neither wise nor good, and though happy was not contented. He must make his fortune, must become great and renowned. A journeyman book-binder at Perugia had no prospect of gaining such ends. Rome was the place for a genius like his, equally daring and supple. To Rome accordingly he repaired. Poverty obliged him to make the journey on foot, but it also freed him from carrying any greater burden than the clothes on his back.

By some unrelated circumstance, Pietro contrived to make his abilities known to Agostini Chighi, a wealthy merchant, and closely connected with several of the principal personages in the pontifical court. It was not long before the sharp wit of the satirist found employment among his new friends and patrons. He might have gained their permanent favour, but the licence of his pen knew no bounds, and a series of verses, infamously gross, intended to illustrate a set of pictures by Giulio Romano, raised against him a storm of public indignation, too strong for him to withstand.

After a brief visit to Arezzo*, he repaired to Florence. He had now a well-known name, and Giovanni de' Medici readily became both his patron and friend. To this distinguished man he was indebted for the favours conferred upon him by Francis I. Giovanni having left the service of the emperor, had now a high command in the French army. Aretino was introduced to the French king at Milan, and by his wit and agreeable manners the

* Mazzuchelli Vita, p. 21. Padova, 1741.

former book-binder of Arezzo acquired the affection of the most accomplished monarch of the age.

Not long after this he was again in Rome. A vulgar love affair, in which he and a gentleman of Bologna were rival suitors to the cook of the Pope's datary, involved him in a dangerous quarrel. The Bolognese could not endure the terrible ridicule of Aretino's satire. Lying in wait for him, he stabbed him in several places, and, binding his hands, left him bleeding on the ground. Aretino always spoke of the affair as an assassination. He appealed to the Pope for justice. The Pope only laughed at his wrath; and Berni, the datary's witty secretary, rejoiced at the opportunity of exposing him to further shame in lines of unparalleled abuse.*

Aretino, in a fit of ungovernable fury, vowed vengeance against the Pope, and left Rome with the determination never to return. Giovanni de' Medici again received him with open arms; but a wound received from a musket-ball proved fatal to the prince, who, after having lingered some time, expired at Mantua, in the year 1526, Aretino affectionately attending him to the last.

Once more left without a patron, the adventurous poet determined thenceforward to trust to his own wit for support, or to live, as he expresses it, by the sweat of his brow. Animated by this bold resolve, he repaired to Venice. Many reasons may be suggested for his selecting the magnificent capital of the commercial world for his permanent residence. He wanted money, and it abounded in Venice. In Venice, talent of every species could find an opportunity for its exercise, and its produc-

* Among the mildest expressions are the following:—

“*Prosuntuoso, porco, mostro infame,
Idol del vituperio, e delle fame.*”

tions an open and ready market. There too lived the great Titian, and other men eminent for their wit and learning, who would know how to appreciate his abilities, and stir them, turbulent by nature, into vigorous use. At Venice, neither pleasure nor opinion suffered restraint from ecclesiastical authority, and he could act, think, and write, without any fear of the Pope or Inquisition.

Aretino was not disappointed in his choice of Venice. After long experience of its character, he pronounced it the paradise of the world. His talents were early appreciated. He enjoyed the friendship of the doge, Andrea Gritti, and lived on terms of close intimacy with other powerful and distinguished members of the government.*

His hatred of Clement VII. had never been concealed, and now that he felt himself safe in Venice, he expressed himself more freely than ever respecting the Pontiff's character. The enemies of Clement did not fail to make the utmost use of the satirist's bitter invectives. They served materially to exasperate the public mind; and it is said, that Aretino was thus a principal agent in the events which led to the siege of Rome, and the captivity of the Pope in the castle of St. Angelo. Andrea Gritti at length admonished him to be less free in his treatment of the Pope's name. This remonstrance had little immediate effect; but about two years later, a great change became apparent in his feelings towards Clement, and he wrote to him, expressing his penitence, and his desire to receive the papal benediction.†

Nothing can better show the extraordinary influence which Aretino had acquired, or the dread attached to his name, than the readiness with which the insulted and

* Mazzuchelli, p. 33.

† Lettere, lib. i. p. 19.

injured Pontiff accepted his return to allegiance. His friend Vasone, suffragan bishop of Vicenza, gladly forwarded to him the brief announcing the Pope's paternal dispositions. To this he replied by another penitential epistle, and about the same time became reconciled to his other enemies at Rome. Among these especially was the Bishop of Verona, Giammatteo Giberti; but with him the old quarrel was soon revived, and the bishop had again to endure the envenomed darts of his satire.

The Emperor Charles V. had some good reasons to be glad of Aretino's assistance. Popular opinion, we have seen, had been materially influenced by the daring language of the satirist, when the imperial cause most needed such aid. Honours were offered as a reward for this help. Aretino might have been created a cavalier. He rejected the offer with a scornful laugh, observing, that a cavalier without wealth was like a wall without a cross, exposed continually to insult. The Cardinal of Ravenna showed a far better acquaintance with his character and wants. Hearing that one of his sisters was about to be married, he sent him five hundred scudi to increase her portion. This sister, however, did him no credit either before or after her marriage. In a letter to the cardinal, he says, that none of the benefits which he had conferred upon him had availed so little to his comfort as the five hundred scudi given to his sister. He had another sister of similar character; but it is suspected that much which has been said respecting them may be attributed to the malice of Berni, and other enemies.*

Notwithstanding the presents heaped upon him from numerous quarters, he was continually complaining of his deficient revenues. Not doubting but that such a

* Mazzuchelli, p. 40.

threat would greatly distress his wealthy friends; he proclaimed his determination to exile himself to Constantinople, and seek, in Turkey, the support denied him by the princes and nobles of his own land.* But instead of going to the east, he contented himself with a visit to Rome, probably to seek the favour of the new Pope, Paul III., but, according to his own profession, merely to enjoy a holiday.

On his return to Venice, he found his friends and patrons more than ever ready to increase his finances. His public reputation advanced with corresponding speed. Whatever he wrote had an immediate and extensive sale. A Spanish gentleman, 'il Magnifico Thomaso Giunti,' wrote to tell him, that a prince of his nation employed a courier for the especial purpose of procuring his works as soon as published.† It is thus he himself describes his popularity at this period: "My head," he says, "is ready to burst with the incessant visits of the great; the very steps of my door are worn away by their continually treading on them, just as the pavement of the capital was worn by the wheels of triumphant chariots. I scarcely believe, indeed, that Rome ever saw such a concourse of people of all ages, as that which besieges my house. Turks, Jews, Indians, French, Germans, Spaniards, are ever seeking me. You may easily imagine what it must be with our Italians. Of the inferior kind of people I say nothing. It would be easier to see you apart from the emperor, than to find me a moment without soldiers, scholars, friars, or priests. I am become, in fact, a very

* His letter on this subject is amusingly characteristic:—"E così l' Aretino, uomo verace, eccetto nei biasimi, che le troppo aspre cagioni mi hanno fatto dare a vostro signore: misero e vecchio se ne va a procacciarsi il pane in Turchia."—*Lettere*, lib. i. p. 30.

† Let., lib. ii. p. 274.

oracle. Some one or other is always arriving to tell me of the faults committed by this or that prince or prelate. By this means I am made 'Secretary to the World,' and I beg you will henceforth so address me." *

Such is the amusing picture which Aretino could give of his present condition. A somewhat more serious one is drawn in another letter, in which he says, "I am contented with what I am; and thank God that I suffer nothing either from a hateful servitude, or the rancour of avarice. I rob no one of his time; nor can I endure to see a fellow-man destitute and naked. Willingly do I share with him what I have, even to my shirt, and the morsel ready for my mouth. My women-servants are as my daughters, my men-servants as my brothers. Peace is the garniture of my chambers, and liberty the major-domo of my house. I eat my bread in gladness, with no wish to be more than I am, but content to live by the sweat of my brow. Neither the blasts of malignity, nor the clouds of envy, have been able to extinguish the light which I thus enjoy. Were I ambitious, I might certainly call myself fortunate." †

Both his mode of living, and his ample resources are intimated in this letter. He was a pensionary of the two greatest sovereigns in Europe. Charles V. had granted him an annual stipend, payable at Milan, of 200 scudi. This was to be doubled, said the Duke of Montmorenci, if Aretino would write and speak of the emperor, his master, with as much favour as of the King of France. The satirist readily assented. Francis had given him, in early times, a gold chain, but had not conferred upon him any substantial or sufficient token of regard. Hence he

* Lettere, lib. i. p. 206.

† December, 1538.

says, in a letter to one of his friends: "I adored the King of France; but to receive no money from him would freeze the furnaces of Murano." It is not known whether Francis became more liberal in after years; but Aretino was never otherwise than loyal to that chivalrous monarch, and seems to have cherished with more than usual gratitude, the memory of his early patronage.

His correspondence with our own King Henry VIII. was not of so prosperous a character. He had dedicated to him a volume of his letters. The English king seemed to care little for an honour greedily coveted by contemporary princes. It is not unlikely that his natural good sense revolted at the extravagant language of Aretino's flattery: "Magnanimous king! glorious king! invincible king! I salute you; you are alone on the earth; you are the love, the astonishment, and the terror, at which the world looks, trembles, admires, and is comforted;"* still stranger: "God willed that Nature should produce you, not as she does other princes, *a bel caso*, but with the utmost care, *a sommo studio*."† Letter after letter did Aretino write to the servants of Henry, to complain of his neglect. "People are astounded," he says "that no sign of courtesy has been exhibited in answer to my dedication." After a delay of five years, the English ambassador at Venice was directed to give the offended satirist 300 scudi. In no good humour, Aretino accused the ambassador of either delaying the payment, or of not giving to the full what was ordered by his sovereign. The Englishman and his suite heard the charge with characteristic indignation. Aretino was waylaid, beaten, stabbed in the arm, and left for dead.

* Let., lib. i. p. 230.

† Dedl., lib. ii. Let., lib. iv. p. 53.

Much as he suffered, he found it prudent to breathe no further suspicion of English honesty.*

Such occurrences as this could not fail to be frequent in the life of a man like Aretino. He loved ridicule and sarcasm for their own sake, as well as for gain, and he resented neglect or injury with abuse so fierce and revengeful, that it exposed him, more than once, to the danger of actual assassination. On such occasions he would confine himself to his house, which he kept carefully barricaded till his enemy had either left the city, or been pacified.

The public visit of Charles V. to Venice brought fresh honour to Aretino. Guidobaldo, Duke of Urbino, one of the four ambassadors chosen to represent the republic, invited Aretino to accompany him when he set out to meet the emperor. Charles received him with marked distinction. The conversation between them was friendly and unembarrassed. "I alluded," says Aretino, "to a portrait of his late consort, which Busseto gave to Titian. He immediately made several inquiries respecting that divine painter, observing that the picture of which I had spoken was very truthful, though done slightly. Continuing the conversation, he solemnly assured me, that he had found his chief comfort on the death of his wife in the perusal of my letter. This he said while his eyes overflowed with tears, so deeply fixed in his heart was the remembrance of his consort. I replied, that it seemed almost incredible to me that my letters should be read by him who held in his hand the sceptre of the world. He answered, that all the nobles of Spain had copies of what I had written on the retreat from Algiers."†

* Aretino had been so often exposed to this sort of chastisement, that he was called "*Il calamità de' pugnali e de' bastoni*."

† Let., lib. iii. p. 42.

On the accession of Julius III., Aretino again determined to seek advancement among the princes of the Church. To smooth the way for promotion in this new career, he wrote several devotional poems, began a paraphrase of the Psalms, composed lives of the Virgin Mary, St. Catherine, and St. Thomas Aquinas, summing up all these efforts by the following sonnet in praise of the Pope himself:—

“Ecco, pur che in più pro nostro ha Dio converso
In Giulio Terzo il gran Giulio Secondo:
E siccome quel fù stupor del mondo
Miracol questo fia dell’ universo.
Egli è di grazie onnipotenti asperso,
E di virtù angeliche fecondo:
Nel senno, e nel valor tanto profondo
Che la fama il decanta in simil verso.
Forza d’ armi, di leggi, e di eloquenza,
Non userà il Pastor, benchè sia tale
In natura, in arbitrio, ed in potenza:
Ma sederà sopra il suo tribunale
La Giustizia, la Pace, e la Clemenza;
Sì che giubili il Ben, languisca il Male.”

“Lo! the great second Julius for our bliss,
Now as the third great Julius is known;
That for the wonder of the world, but this
The miracle of the universe we own!
Graces omnipotent his throne surround,
Ripe virtues his, angelical and rare:
Himself in sense and goodness so profound
That Fame regards him as her equal care.
Though such he be in nature, state and might,
The force of arms that pastor will not use,
Nor laws, nor eloquence, but rather choose
To place on his tribunal holy right,
And peace, and mercy. Hence we soon shall see
Evil decay, and good keep jubilee.”

Expressions in Aretino’s letters have led to the opinion, that he had at one time the confident hope of becoming a cardinal.* It is difficult to believe that the Roman

* Speaking of a cardinal, *Let.*, lib. vi. p. 293., in comparison with himself, he says, the difference between us is, “ch’ egli è cardinale,

Pontiff ever gave encouragement to such an expectation. Men as worldly and vicious had doubtless attained to the honour of the purple, but none so notorious as Aretino for the unbridled use of the pen, or with so many enemies ready to shame the Church by the exposure of his vices. Notwithstanding, therefore, the advantage which he enjoyed of visiting Rome under the auspices of the Duke of Urbino, he gained no step towards the College of Cardinals. Julius gave him an affectionate reception, embraced him, and kissed his forehead. He even made him a cavalier of the Church, and eventually gave him a thousand crowns of gold; but he succeeded so ill in satisfying him, that the rapacious satirist told a friend, that he would put his pen into the whole great legendary of the saints; and "I swear to you," he added, "that when I have composed my book, I will dedicate it to Sultan Soliman."

Large as his income was at this time, he needed it all to support his domestic expenses. His table was always furnished with the rarest and most costly delicacies, nor could the richest noble surpass him in his choice of wines. He never left home to dine at another house; but he rejoiced to gather round his own table such men as Titian, and others distinguished for their wit and taste. His own appearance answered to the sumptuous furniture of his house and mode of living. No man in Italy, it is said, wore vestments of richer materials or newer fashion than those selected by Aretino.

Nor were his expenses confined to the gratification of his own wants. He had the same large notion of liberality when he was himself to exercise it, as he had when he looked for it on his own behalf. Thus his house was

e ch' io non ho voluto essere:" whether he spoke the truth in this assertion of his not wishing for the dignity is generally doubted.

the general resort of the unfortunate. "Every one runs to me," he says, "as if I had a royal treasure at my command. If a poor woman prove in labour, my house pays for it; if any one be thrown into prison, I must provide for him. Sick soldiers, miserable pilgrims, wandering cavaliers, all flock to me; while every one who happens to be sick sends to my apothecary for physic, which, of course, I must pay for."

But he had a cause of trouble which tended to mar all the comfort of his latter days. Of two favourite daughters, one died in early youth. He grieved over her with a sorrow so deep and lasting, that it is one of those things which render the real character of this extraordinary man so difficult to determine. The surviving daughter, became as she grew up, an object of his constant solicitude. It was with no slight pleasure, therefore, that he found her sought in marriage by a gentleman of good family and reputation. But a dowry was an indispensable condition of the contract. Aretino seems never to have had much ready-money. He, however, entered into the necessary engagements, and a day was appointed for the espousals. The day arrived; the ceremony was commenced, and had proceeded to the point at which the bridegroom was to give the ring. But instead of putting it on the finger of the blushing girl, he held it fast in his hand, and quietly turning to Aretino, told him that now was the time for his paying the dowry. Undaunted as the satirist had been in the most terrible conflicts of his strange life, he shrunk from this humiliating trial. His purse was empty; but he had the rich gold chain, given him in early days by the King of France. Precious as it was to him, he offered it in pledge for the payment of the dowry. The ring was given, and the marriage proceeded. On leaving the

church, the bridegroom quietly saluted his bride, and then took his leave, telling her that he should be ready to lead her home as soon as he was paid the dowry. This was at length effected. But notwithstanding Aretino's own kindness and forbearance, and the friendly interference of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, the marriage proved a most unhappy one. Aretino found his son-in-law both a miser and a churl. He had given his daughter a diamond-ring. No peace was allowed the unhappy woman because she refused to convert into money this token of her father's affection. Other causes of dispute followed in rapid succession, and only terminated in a final separation.

We hear nothing further of any interruption to Aretino's general prosperity. However difficult it might be for him to save money, he could proudly say, "That which I glory in more than in anything else, is that I do not owe a penny in the world." A dispute with Niccolò Franco, a scholar of some ability, threatened for a time his reputation rather than his peace. Niccolò, during a period of adversity, enjoyed the hospitable shelter of Aretino's house; and expressed his gratitude by freely communicating to his host the choicest stores of his memory. When some violent dispute separated them, Niccolò openly asserted that many of the best passages in the works of Aretino were due to his help, and could never have been written by the satirist himself. Aretino and his friends laughed at the accusation, and the poor scholar sank back into his former obscurity.

His affection for Titian involved him in another dispute. Tintoret heard with indignation the unfair expressions which he had used while criticising his works. He knew his friendship for Titian, and had no wish to disturb it; but he claimed for himself that share of

praise which he believed his due. Concealing his ill-humour, however, he invited Aretino to sit for his portrait. The invitation flattered the satirist's vanity, and was readily accepted. On the appointed day, he entered Tintoret's studio, and immediately took a position suited, as he thought, for the artist's purpose; but Tintoret, after a brief pause, led him into the middle of the room, and bidding him stand upright, proceeded to take his measure. "Yes," he said, muttering to himself, "the wretch measures just two pistols and a half." "Why, what are you about, Jacopo?" exclaimed the astonished Aretino. "I am measuring the proper length for a pistol-shot," was the reply. An explanation followed, and the painter and satirist became excellent friends.

His admiration of the works of Titian is strongly expressed in a letter written to the painter, on one Christmas morning: "I have received," he says, "on this morning of the Nativity, a copy of that true and living Jesus, the original of which you gave the emperor, the most precious gift that ever monarch received from his most devoted subject. The crown of thorns is indeed a crown of thorns, the blood which flows from the wounds is indeed blood. So awfully is grief depicted on the face of Jesus, that it moves to repentance; nor can any one contemplate the pacific grace diffused over the entire form, and retain in his own bosom any feeling of hate or rancour. The room where I sleep, and where this picture hangs, has no longer, therefore, the appearance of a mere fine chamber; it is changed into a temple of God, and I shall convert pleasure into prayer, and licence into purity."

We have, unhappily, no evidence to show that the pious resolutions here expressed were ever fulfilled. Aretino, now sixty-five, had no warning of his ap-

proaching end. His death was occasioned by accident. During a fit of laughter, excited by some guest at his table, he overbalanced his chair, and falling upon his head, instantly expired.

Aretino derived his power, and his writings their value, solely from contemporary circumstances. The great men whom he flattered, and by whom he was praised and pensioned in return, were too wise to mistake his talent for genius; but they knew how powerful his audacity, and keen rough satire, made him, when needed to excite popular prejudice. There is more sly humour in the extravagant praises which he bestows upon himself than any real proof of extreme vanity. He had medals cast to commemorate his triumphs, he sent his portrait to princes, as a present richly worthy of their acceptance, and on the title-pages of his books he called himself "The Divine Peter Aretino, the Scourge of Princes," and "by divine grace, a free man," and sometimes still more pompously, "Acerrimus virtutum ac vitiorum Demonstrator."

But notwithstanding this, and the numerous other extravagances with which he may justly be charged, he had a vast store of good earnest sense, which it only needed some higher motive than worldly gain to convert into forms of permanent usefulness.

Few readers are now disposed to read the plays, and still less the religious poems and histories of Aretino. His letters, in six volumes, are an autobiographical miscellany of facts and opinions curiously exaggerated, sometimes for a purpose, at others by the natural humour of the author, knowing that the only readers to whom he cared to be intelligible would have no difficulty in detecting his meaning. The critics who have deigned to notice his works seem generally too angry with his

arrogance to find any reason for his original popularity. Menage says, that he had read all the letters of Peter Aretino without finding anything in them worth extracting for his miscellany. "It is merely," he adds, "their style which takes."* Menage was never more mistaken, unless by style he understood the fierce, tormenting meaning of his satires, or the shape which his peculiar originality gave to whatever he described. The excellent Tiraboschi passes a still more severe judgment upon Aretino.† But these and all such criticisms have been rendered harmless by the more terrible sentence of posterity, consigning both the satirist and his writings to oblivion:

* Menagiana, p. 396. Edit. Hol.

† Storia, t. vii. lib. iii. p. 1041.

BERNARDO TASSO



THE name of Tasso, now only known by the splendour of its literary glory, had been ennobled for centuries before the birth of Bernardo, by the actions of his illustrious ancestors. It is creditable to human nature to find how little honours of any other kind are regarded, when exposed to comparison with those which belong to intellectual eminence. The forefathers of Bernardo, and the more celebrated Torquato, were men of high renown in their day; but no one thinks of inquiring into their history, except in connection with the admirable poets who have immortalised the name. The earliest authentic accounts of the Tassi represent them as established at Almenno, about five miles from Bergamo, and soon after as lords of Cornello, a mountainous district in the neighbourhood. In 1290, Omodeo de' Tassi, invented the system of regular posts, and his descendants becoming the general superintendents of the offices in Flanders, Spain, and Germany, they rose to the highest dignities, and, in the latter country, became sovereign princes.

Bernardo was born on the 11th of November, 1493, at Bergamo.* His parents were Gabriello, son of Ruggero,

* Serassi, *Della Patria di B. e T. de' Tassi*. 1751.

and Caterina de' Tassi, a noble Venetian lady.* The first instructor to whom his education was intrusted was Gio. Batista Pio, of Bologna, under whose care he manifested a singular aptitude for learning, and inspired his parents with sanguine hopes of his future eminence. But both his father and mother were taken off in his childhood by a premature death, and he was left with a sister, still younger than himself, to the care of his maternal uncle, Luigi Tasso, Bishop of Recanati. The property which he inherited from his father was not sufficient to support and educate him; but Luigi placed him in an academy, and his little sister in a monastery, paying for their education out of his own purse. The progress which the orphans made in their respective studies sufficiently rewarded him for his benevolence. Bordelisia became a nun, and took the name of Afra, distinguishing herself by so sweet and amiable a conduct, that her memory was revered long after her death by the sisters of Santa Grata. Bernardo applied himself successfully to the classics, and no less so to Italian verse. The latter was his chief employment in the delightful vacations which he spent at his uncle's pleasant villa, at Redona, about a mile from Bergamo. During one of these visits, the bishop was barbarously murdered, and the house stripped by some of the servants.

The death of his uncle, whom he loved as a parent, again left Bernardo solitary. But he had just sufficient property to enable him to travel for a time, and spend a life of leisure. Bidding adieu, therefore, to Bergamo, he set out on his wanderings, and, in the early part of them, became acquainted with Ginevra Malatesta, a lady whom he passionately admired as a paragon of beauty and virtue.

* Seghezzi, *Vita*. Pad., 1733.

But she became the wife of a gentleman of the Obizzi family, and he bade her a formal farewell. The sonnet which he composed for this purpose was so admired for its pathos and delicacy, that there was not, it is said, a lord or lady in Italy who could not repeat it. But beginning now to feel the weariness of an idle life, he accepted the office of secretary to the Count Guido Rangone, General of the Pontifical Forces. In this capacity he witnessed the desperate struggles which took place between Clement VII. and the emperor, and was deputed by Guido to carry on some important negotiations for the Pope and the allies. At the termination of the war, he proceeded to Ferrara, where he was appointed secretary to the duchess. But in 1531 he published at Venice the volume of poems which laid the permanent foundation of his literary fame. It especially attracted the attention of Ferrante Sanseverino, Prince of Salerno, himself a poet of considerable ability. Delighted with the genius which it displayed, and having heard of the author's talent for business, he sent him a pressing invitation to Salerno, offering, at the same time, to make him his secretary. Bernardo accepted the offer, and, quickly obtaining the entire confidence of the prince, was rewarded for his services by the grant of numerous and valuable offices. Thus increasing in wealth, he took a splendid house, and lived in a style of costly magnificence. In 1534, he republished his former collection, with the addition of several new pieces, dedicating the work in general to the prince, but the second portion of it to his consort, Isabella Villamarina. Soon after this, he accompanied his patron to Africa, on occasion of the expedition of Charles V. against Tunis. On his return to Salerno, he published his "*Terzo libro degli Amori*," and soon after married

Porzia de' Rossi, daughter of Giacomo di Pistoia and Lucretia de' Gambacozzi, formerly lords of Pisa, and subsequently marquesses of Celenza. By this union, therefore, he became connected with some of the greatest personages in Italy. His wife also brought him a considerable fortune, and was herself, in every respect, worthy of the affection which crowned their marriage. Their first child, Cornelia, was remarkable in her infancy for wit and intelligence, and, to secure her from the dangers of the court, was, at an early age, placed in a convent. Their next, Torquato, died in his infancy, leaving the name for his illustrious brother, who was born soon after Bernardo had set out with the prince in 1544 to join the forces of the emperor, under his general the Marquess del Vasto.

A short time previous to this expedition, he had commenced his poem of "Amadigi," founded on the old story of Amadis de Gaul. The prince, knowing Bernardo's love of study, made few calls upon his attention, except on occasions of extraordinary necessity. Though he himself resided at Naples, and Bernardo received a handsome stipend as his secretary, he had permitted him to live in a delicious retirement at Sorrento. The period spent in this uninterrupted enjoyment of literature was the happiest of Bernardo's life, and the "Amadigi" was planned when he could hope to pass many years in these tranquil occupations. He at first determined to write his poem in *versi sciolti*, conceiving that the rhyming metres were only fitted for light and amatory poetry. So thought his friend Speroni, who had a great contempt for rhyme, and regarded it as destroying the gravity and elevation which should belong to an heroic poem. This opinion, however, was controverted by the prince, and by Don Luigi d' Avila, and others, whom he met in

Flanders, and who desiring to see Bernardo imitate Ariosto, induced him to change his plan.

His expedition with Sanseverino did not interrupt the progress of the poem. In the midst of the alarms of war and the interruptions of business, he continued to add stanza after stanza to the "*Amadigi*," composing the greater part of the work on horseback. At the conclusion of the war he returned to Sorrento, and apprehended no further interruption either to his literary plans or his domestic happiness. He was lamentably disappointed.

The Viceroy of Naples, Don Pedro di Toleda, desirous of keeping the province in stricter subjection to the emperor, proposed to introduce the Inquisition. But the people indignantly protested against the design, and Don Pedro immediately declared the city in a state of insurrection. The sentiments of the Prince of Salerno were sufficiently well understood to make the people desirous of interesting him in their favour; and they accordingly deputed Carlo Brancazio to represent their grievances to him, and require his mediation with the emperor, that the obnoxious viceroy might be removed. Sanseverino consulted Bernardo, and was advised by the poet to take the part of the people. This counsel was strongly opposed by Vincenzo Martelli, the major-domo of the prince, who admired the viceroy as much as Tasso disliked him. But the opinion of Bernardo was followed, and the prince set off on his mission. Unhappily, the partisans of Don Pedro had anticipated him with the emperor, and he only returned to be assailed by assassins, to find himself suspected by the emperor, and obliged, for safety, to forsake his domains, and join the King of France.

Bernardo was in Rome when he heard that the terri-

tory of Sanseverino was confiscated, and the prince himself declared a rebel. For some time he vacillated between returning to his home, and following the fortunes of his fallen master. His loyalty prevailed, and its present fruits were exile, and the confiscation of his property. One of his biographers coldly questions, whether he did not balance the hope of future advantages against this immediate sacrifice.* Having, however, taken his resolution, he removed his wife and daughter to Naples, and provided them with splendid apartments in the palace Gambacosti. There Porzia would be near her relatives, and he vainly hoped that she might depend on them for comfort in her distress. He then joined the prince at Venice, and after spending a few days at Bergamo, hastened to France, thinking to persuade the king that, by forming an union with Sultan Soliman, he might attack Naples with certain success, and at once humble the power of the emperor. Henry listened with sufficient attention to these proposals to flatter the prince and Bernardo that they would be speedily restored in triumph to their country. To effect the intended plan, it was necessary that Sanseverino should proceed to Constantinople to obtain the concurrence of the sultan. But the sultan was unwilling to engage in the project, and Henry on that account still more so. Bernardo, therefore, having nothing farther to retain him near the person of his patron, returned to Rome, where he corresponded with him secretly on the state of their affairs, and the measures to be adopted for their improvement.

The change which had taken place in his fortune made no alteration in his desire of literary fame. Having added greatly to his miscellaneous compositions, he sent

* Seghezzi.

his later productions to Lodovico Dolce at Venice, where he had already published in 1551 two volumes of letters, under the care of the same friend. The whole of his former poems were reprinted with those now sent for publication, and the work appeared in 1555, beautifully printed by Gabriel Giolito.* His "Amadigi" in the meantime was gradually increasing under his hand, and in the letter which accompanied the poems sent to Lodovico for publication, he observes, that he was approaching the conclusion. In speaking of his situation at this period, and of his compositions, he says: "I have delayed, my most gentle Lodovico, to send you this fourth book, wishing to let you have the copy well and correctly written; but my long and troublesome indisposition, though not dangerous, has hindered my doing so. Not to delay any longer, I send you the manuscript neither punctuated nor remarkably correct, being certain, from the affection you bear me, that you will not think it too great a fatigue to do that for me which I have not been able to do for myself. I give you, therefore, authority not only to alter the writing, which has certainly much need of it in many places, but the sentences and the words; the opinion I have of your judgment, and the affection you bear me, securing me from any danger of suffering by this confidence. Print, then, the three books of my 'Amori' first, and then this fourth book with the dedication to Madame Margherita, which I hereby send you, and in the order in which it is to appear. And as there are in the third book of the 'Rime di Diversi Autori,' canzoni and sonnets written by me, but ascribed to M. Randolfo Porrino, and as I think the laws allow a man to take his own coat wherever he finds it, if he know it to be his

* Serassi.

own, I have put these same pieces in this book, being certain that that excellent man, who would probably not have deigned to place my verses in comparison with his, will not be offended at my so doing. I moreover beg you to pray M. Gabriello to let the copies which he is to send me as marks of respect for my friends, be printed on good paper, and somewhat larger than the rest, and especially the copy which I intend sending to the Court of France, and I will pay the expense of the paper." Dated Rome, October 20, 1554.*

The solace afforded by these literary occupations lightened considerably the weight of his misfortunes. But the death of his amiable wife overwhelmed him with a new and unexpected grief. He had scarcely, it seems, proceeded to France when attempts were made by her brothers to deprive her of her fortune. In vain did she strive to escape their persecutions and rejoin her husband. So skilfully did they pursue their plans, that to leave the country would, she knew, be the means of immediately depriving her children of support. Thus she became involved in successive law-suits and altercations. Eventually, two-thirds of her dowry were taken from her, a drawback of fifteen hundred ducats was made on the income previously received, and at the end of the suits the unfortunate lady died, worn out with fatigue and sorrow.

The circumstances which had thus contributed to deprive Bernardo of his affectionate consort, affected him also in another way. His property having been almost entirely dissipated, all he had left for his support was the allowance received from Sanseverino; but that prince, either from the bad state of his own affairs, or from

* *Lettere*, vol. ii. p. 144.

having less regard for his secretary, now that his talents were of little use to him, neglected to remit the pension, and Bernardo was left in a situation of extreme difficulty. In a letter written to the prince, soon after the death of his wife, he expresses himself with feelings which seem to have partaken both of sorrow and anger. His letters and applications, he says, had all been left unanswered : "In my last," continues he, "I informed you of the death of my unfortunate wife, with the total ruin of my miserable children, who by the loss of their mother are deprived of their inheritance, and the only hope and support of their lives. Think, my lord, what must be my situation, and whether I do not stand in need of consolation and assistance ; yet I must confess that your conduct towards me distresses me more than all my losses and troubles. God, from whom no secret of the heart can be hidden, knows that no prince could be served with more fidelity, with more affection, than I have served you. So I pray that He may either incline your Excellency to reward my services with that liberality of mind which becomes a grateful and virtuous prince, or that He may give me patience to support my wrongs, and provide for my necessities."*

This, and other letters equally strong, remained unanswered. Bernardo, therefore, finding that neither remonstrance nor entreaty could move his patron, at length determined to fix himself at Rome, and, taking the habit of a priest, pass the remainder of his life in the service of religion. Scarcely had he formed this resolution, when intelligence arrived that the imperial forces had occupied Ostia, Tivoli, and the whole neighbourhood of the city. With some difficulty he contrived to escape, accompanied

* Lettere, vol. ii. p. 170.

by two servants, and taking with him nothing more than a few clothes and his poems. He bent his course to Ravenna. While there, the Duke of Urbino sent him an urgent invitation to Pesaro, and appointed for his residence the beautiful Stanza del Barchetto. The correction and completion of the "*Amadigi*," now formed his sole employment, and it was at last made ready for the press. He had conceived the most sanguine expectations respecting the success of this work, and from the interest with which its appearance was looked for in all the literary circles of Europe, he had reason to hope that it would permanently establish his fame.

But the printing was an undertaking involving no slight expense, and to a man in Bernardo's situation, was not to be easily accomplished. It is, therefore, creditable to the Venetian academicians of that age, to have it left on record that they offered to print the work at the charge of their establishment. The anxiety, however, which Bernardo felt to profit by the publication, prevented his accepting this offer, and he had the good fortune to obtain the kind assistance of the duke, his protector, the Cardinal di Tornone, and others, towards the expenses.* Having received, therefore, the contributions of his friends, he set off for Venice in 1558, to superintend the printing himself, and had the pleasure of seeing his work appear with all the correctness and elegance an author could desire. Besides the "*Amadigi*," his "*Rime*" were also printed at the same time, and another volume of his letters; and, not long after, his "*Ragionamento*," which he had previously recited before the academy.

But his attention was now recalled from literature to

* Serassi, *Vita*, p. 38.

the cares of his family. His daughter, whom he loved with the tenderest affection, and whose virtues and beauty were equal to those of the lamented Porzia, was married without his consent to Marzio Sersale, a poor gentleman of Sorrento. The union, it appears, had been accomplished through the unjust intervention of Scipio Rossi, one of her maternal relatives, and the father regarded the circumstance as adding greatly to his former distresses. It had been his hope that Cornelia, by being settled near him, would be able to comfort him in his old age, and in some measure supply by her attentions the place of her mother. Her marriage with a person in the territory of Naples seemed to render this impossible. So good a report, however, was shortly brought him of the virtues of his son-in-law, that he gradually ceased to complain, and wrote to Marzio expressing his paternal feelings towards him. "Your letters," says he, "are very dear to me, and if I consented not to your marriage, it was not on your account, but from a desire that my daughter should marry in a part of the country where I might enjoy, from frequently seeing her, that consolation which an affectionate parent looks for. But since it has pleased God, who rules all things according to his will, to order it thus, I have already made His will mine, and look upon you now in the same manner as if you had been chosen by me for a son-in-law, only wishing that Cornelia had not used those expressions towards me and her brother which become not an affectionate and pious daughter. But I pardon all, and am afflicted that the righteous Judge has punished her as He has done."* The last words allude to a loss which Cornelia and her husband had lately suffered by the descent of some corsair on

* *Lettere*, vol. ii. p. 473.

Sorrento, and from whose hands, it appears by another letter, they themselves had a very narrow escape.

Bernardo experienced at Venice the most flattering attention. There were residing there at that time his friend Lodovico Dolce, and several other literary acquaintances, who honoured his talents, and received him among them as a valuable addition to their circle. He was elected secretary of the academy, and had a regular stipend appointed him in virtue of his office. His circumstances being thus considerably improved, and his spirits becoming better every day, he hired a handsome house, which, having always had a taste for elegant furniture, as appeared by his residence at Sorrento, he fitted up in a style of comparative magnificence. He had at the same time sent for Torquato, who reached Venice a few months after his own arrival there, and who found that city as agreeable to his taste as it was to his father's.

Bernardo had fondly looked both for reputation and pecuniary advantage from the publication of the "*Amadigi*," nor had he neglected to employ any means which appeared likely to produce the desired results. He had begun it with the view of pleasing his patron, and the nobles of the Spanish Court. According to his own judgment, it would have appeared better in the grave and sonorous heroic measure, but at their suggestion, he complacently undertook to rival Ariosto. In the original plan of the story, the rules of the epic were followed with the most careful attention; there was to be but a single action, and the design was so perfect and regular, according to Torquato, that the most rigid critic could not have found fault with it. But, according to the same authority, we learn, that Bernardo's desire of pleasing his patron overcame his better judgment, and that he was willing to sacrifice his character as a poet to his ambition as a courtier,

- Having composed, it seems, some of the first cantos after his own plan, he read them to the prince, and at the commencement of the reading, either the reputation which he already possessed, or curiosity to hear so interesting a romance as the *Amadis* versified in Italian, collected a large number of nobles and gentlemen of the court. But, before he ceased his recital, the room was nearly empty, and he concluded from this circumstance, that if he meant to please, he must not adhere to unity of design or action. He accordingly, though as Torquato says, unwillingly, complied with the desire of Sanseverino, and forsook the rules of Aristotle and the critics, for the suggestions of the prince. But he not only changed the style and plan of the poem in obedience to the will of those from whom he expected promotion: he altered even the characters from a similar motive. The Duke of Urbino, as true a friend as he had ever possessed, was now himself connected with the Spanish monarch, Philip II., and he hoped that Bernardo might by proper management obtain a reversal of the decree which had banished him, and confiscated his property. The poet, unwilling to lose any opportunity for effecting such an object, consented to follow the Duke's advice, and instead of dedicating the work to Henry II. of France, as he had always intended, resolved to bring it out under the patronage of Philip. But this determination made it necessary to change not merely the dedication, but some very important parts of the poem. It contained in its original shape, and just as it was about to appear, several long passages in praise of the French king, and different members of his family; the personages also of the tale representing, in more than one instance, individuals of the royal house. The change in the dedication made it necessary that all these should be either removed, or

modified in such a manner as to conceal the proper intention of the author. Bernardo, therefore, could be charged with no imprudent obstinacy with regard to his poem. Few authors were ever more willing to follow advice than he appears to have been ; and were the fortune of a man of letters to be made by such means, Bernardo Tasso must surely have acquired one. Nor did he rest satisfied with merely attending to the composition of the work. He laid all his plans respecting the publication with the greatest caution. Having taken the advice of many of the best critics respecting its correctness, he next carefully calculated in what manner he might best secure a profitable return for these labours. Rejecting, as we have seen, the interference of the Academy, he very prudently formed an arrangement with the printer, Gabriel Giolito, by which he freed himself from at least some portion of the risk. He even hoped to persuade Giolito to illustrate the whole poem with engravings, but the cost was too great, and he was well contented to send some of the best copies to his noble friends elegantly bound.

But notwithstanding all these preparations, the complacency with which he attended to the wishes of princes and courtiers, and the care bestowed on the arrangements which concerned the publication, the *Amadigi* was far from obtaining the success which the author expected. The hundred and fifty persons to whom he sent copies, did little more than return him civil thanks for the compliment ; and what was still more distressing to him, Philip, who he hoped would be moved by the dedication to restore him to his former condition, treated it with indifference, and left the poet equally unrewarded and unnoticed.

A severer lesson was never read to authors than this

of Bernardo's on the subject of patronage. His weak yielding to the caprices of those about him, marred his original purpose in the composition of his poem, and thereby took away that pleasure which a writer feels when following his imagination on the path where they first met. The poet must be alone with his thoughts, and believe in their infallibility and sanctity, or he will penetrate into none of those mysteries of his art by which he is to make the world venerate him as a superior being. So long as an author follows the teachings of his genius, and works by the model which exists in his own mind, he will, at any rate, be sure of producing compositions as excellent, to the full extent, as the character of his intellect. The ideas and plans which a man knows to be his own, he instinctively develops with more care than he does those which are only adopted; and thus whether it be a poem, a problem in science, or even a mechanical invention, excellence will only be in proportion to originality, because it is this alone which can excite that intellectual energy which gives either strength or beauty to the thoughts.

Bernardo had not yet ended his official career. In 1563 he was appointed chief secretary to Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. The duties of this appointment left him considerable leisure, and soon after his settlement at Mantua he formed the design of constructing a separate poem out of the episode of Floridante in the *Amadigi*. The idea of this work so delighted him, that he made the following note, commemorating the day of the month and week when he began to compose it. "In the name of God," says the inscription on the title of the manuscript, "I commenced my *Floridante* on Wednesday, November 24th, 1563." He did not live to complete it, but it was revised and prepared for the press by Torquato, who

published it with a dedication to Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua. The manuscript of this work was shown to Seghezzi by Apostolo Zeno. Like all the other manuscripts of Bernardo, it was written in the clearest and most beautiful hand, those of Torquato, it has been observed, being equally remarkable for incorrectness and obscurity.

Gonzaga rejoiced at every opportunity of advancing his eminent secretary, and appointed him governor of Ostiglia. But the life of this illustrious father of a more illustrious son was now drawing to a close. He died at Ostiglia, September 4th, 1569, and was buried in the church of St. Egidio at Mantua. The duke raised a monument to his memory, inscribing it simply with the words "Ossa Bernardo Tasso." To the great grief of Torquato this monument was destroyed during the repairs of the church, and it is conjectured, from some expressions in one of his letters, that the body was removed to the church of St. Paul at Ferrara.

Bernardo Tasso deserves a higher place among the poets of Italy than he popularly enjoys. He is compared with Ariosto, and fails in those qualities of natural grace and exuberant fancy, which distinguish the Orlando. Had he taken a path of his own, both his powers of imagination and richly cultivated mind would have secured him a lasting fame. His letters, published in seven volumes, are eminently characterised by beauty of style and noble sentiments.

Among the numerous literary acquaintances of Bernardo, were Cardinal Bembo, Speroni, Vittoria Colonna, and other writers, who, though popular in their own times, have left little to interest a modern reader. Atanagi was the scholar whom the Duke of Urbino selected to assist in the correction of the *Amadigi*. He had distinguished himself both as a critic and a poet, but after

twenty years' residence at Rome, and passing from one patron to another, he found himself destitute in the world, and ready to perish with want and sickness. Conveyed in a litter to his native home, he was hopeless of succour, when the Duke and Bernardo invited him to Urbino. He rejoicingly obeyed the call, and having rendered good service in the revisal of the *Amadigi*, wrote a poem, commemorating his patron's hospitality.

"Anime bella, e di virtute amiche
Cui fero sdegno di fortuna offende;
Si che vengite povere, e mendiche
Come a lei piace, che pietà contende:
Se di por fine a le miserie antiche
Caldo desio l' afflitto cor v' accende:
Ratto correte a la gran Quercia d' oro,
Onde avrete alimento, ombra, e ristoro.
Quì regna un signor, placido e benigno," &c.

Exalted spirits! friends of virtue, whom
Fortune, with hate and fierce disdain, pursues;
Who, poor and friendless, weep a hopeless doom,
The sport of her whom pity vainly woos:
If in your sorrowing hearts the thought arise
To seek some shelter from your ancient grief,
There, where the Oak of Gold from dark'ning skies
A screen affords, and promise of relief;
There seek thy rest, for there a prince benign
Has lightened cares and woes as great as mine.

His sickness returned, but he accompanied Bernardo to Venice, where he is said to have passed the remainder of his life, supporting himself by correcting works for publication, and giving critical opinions to the various authors who had confidence in his judgment.

Lodovico Dolce, Sperone Speroni, and other authors of similar standing, lived, like Atanagi, depending, by turns, on the support of patrons, and the favour of the public. The experience of such men would engage our deepest sympathies could we study it with sufficient minuteness.

But there is another name which requires a longer notice. Few of the illustrious women whose lives employ the pen of the biographer, have a greater claim to our regard than Vittoria Colonna. This admirable poetess was born in the castle of Marino, in the year 1490. Her father was Fabricio Colonna, Grand Constable of Naples, and her mother Anna di Montefeltro, daughter of the Duke of Urbino. She was scarcely four years old when her parents affianced her to Francesco, son of Don Alphonso d'Avalos, Marquis of Pescara, a child of about her own age. As she grew up, her beauty and talents became the object of universal admiration, and her hand was sought in marriage by the dukes of Savoy and Braganza. But her own affection, as well as the honour of her parents, prevented any breach of the early contract: and her nuptials with the marquis were solemnised, on her reaching her seventeenth year, with the splendour proper to so noble an alliance.

Francesco's military ambition separated them at an early period of their union. He was chosen general of the imperial cavalry, but in the battle of Ravenna was taken prisoner, and conveyed to Milan. His captivity was of short duration, and in the memorable victory gained over Francis I. at Pavia, the Marquis of Pescara shone pre-eminent both for generalship and valour. But he had excited the envy of rivals rather than the gratitude of the emperor. His disgust at the neglect with which he was treated became a matter of notoriety. Agents were employed to sound him on the subject of a league against the emperor. The bribe offered him might have dazzled a less wavering mind. If the confederacy succeeded, he was to receive, as his share of the spoils, the crown of Naples. Still more: he was to be immortalised as one of the deliverers of Italy.

While exposed to these temptations, he was lying sick at Milan, suffering both from the effect of wounds received in battle, and from a dangerous illness which he had brought on by excessive indulgence in draughts of cold water, when heated by anxiety and toil. Vittoria heard of both circumstances with agonising anxiety. Her nice feeling of honour shrunk from the thought of her husband's violating his fidelity. In writing to him on the subject, she implored him to remember how poor is the glory of sovereignty in comparison with that of an upright and noble character. For herself, she added, it was not her ambition to be the wife of a king, but of a man who dare combat with kings in a rightful cause; or who, still better, could at all times excel them by a pure and unconquerable virtue.

His wife's persuasions made a powerful impression on Francesco's mind. But he was spared the pain of any lengthened struggle with temptation. His sickness rapidly increased. Vittoria was warned of his danger, and immediately set out for Milan. She had only reached Viterbo, when a messenger met her, bearing the intelligence that the marquis had breathed his last.

Francesco with his dying lips had recommended her to the protection of his cousin, the Marquis del Vasto, the inheritor of his estates. His character well fitted him for such a charge. But Vittoria's grief long resisted every attempt made to soothe it. She fell into a profound melancholy. Religion came to her relief. She could indulge in its consolations without disturbing the cherished image of her past happiness. As her beauty returned with her improving health and spirits, she received many offers of marriage from men of the highest rank. Her relatives anxiously pressed her not to reject such advances, but she uniformly replied, that though

her husband might seem dead to others, he was still living, and always present, to her. Her poems breathe the same sentiments, and are so true to feelings actually experienced, that she is acknowledged by Italian critics to be unsurpassed in the expression of the affections softened, but yet elevated, by sorrow. Devotion became to her an ever increasing source of comfort. It led her to the deeper study of religious truth. Feelings which had hitherto been only like the dreamings of an ardent fancy, became connected with substantial realities; and her "Rime Spirituali" well deserve all the praise bestowed upon them by her contemporaries.

In the spring of 1537, she made a journey to Lucca, and thence to Ferrara. While in that city, she formed the design of visiting Jerusalem, and was only deterred by the earnest entreaties of her friend the Marquis del Vasto. Rome was the next place of her abode. There she received all the attention due to her merits and piety. Cardinal Pole was one of the distinguished men who most highly appreciated her worth. The poet Molza alluding to her influence at the Papal Court, says, in a letter to his son, that she had more power to render them assistance than either the Pope himself, or his cardinals.*

As she advanced in years, she became anxious to escape more entirely from the agitations of the world. She accordingly retired to the convent of Saint Catherine in Viterbo; and was there in 1542. In 1547 she had returned to Rome, where she soon after fell sick and died, universally lamented.

* Giam. Rota. *Vita*.

GIOVAN-GIORGIO TRISSINO.

GIOVAN-GIORGIO TRISSINO was born in the city of Vicenza, on the 7th of July, 1478. His parents were Gasparo Trissino and Cecilia di Guilielmo Bevilacqua. The family of the Trissini was one of the most ancient and honourable of Vicenza, and Gasparo possessed a fortune sufficiently large to enable him to raise a company of three hundred soldiers at his own expense. At the head of this band, he served the Republic of Venice on many occasions of importance ; but in the year 1487, having been obliged to retreat from a body of Germans under Roverado di Trento, he took his defeat so much to heart, that he was seized with a fever which terminated his life in the thirty-ninth year of his age.

The education of the orphan was not neglected. Being sent to Milan, he there conceived that passionate love for the language and literature of Greece which greatly influenced his future pursuits.

But he did not confine his attention to literature. Mathematics and philosophy employed a great portion of his time, and to these studies he added that of architecture. This he pursued with so much ardour, that he wrote a treatise on the subject, and, not content with the mere theory of the science, the elegant palace which he sub-

sequently built in the village of Aricoli, a short distance from Vicenza, was raised entirely according to his own designs. Even the celebrated Andrea Palladio is generally believed to have owed his first instructions in the art to Trissino. In the life of the architect, by Paolo Giraldo, it is said, that "Andrea, already become a sculptor, having contracted a close intimacy with Trissino, his compatriot, and one of the first literary men of the age, was found by the poet to be a youth of great ability, and much inclined to the mathematical sciences; to encourage which disposition he explained Vitruvius to him, and took him to Rome, where he measured and made drawings of the most admired structures in the ancient city." Palladio was not ungrateful for the assistance thus rendered him in his youth, and has left honourable mention of Trissino in the preface to his celebrated work on the orders of architecture.

In 1504, Trissino married Giovanna Tiene, a lady of noble family, and his townswoman. By her he had two sons, Francesco, who died young, and Giulio, who entered the church, and was made arch-Priest of the cathedral of Vicenza. Giovanna lived but a short time after giving birth to Giulio, and her death plunged Trissino into the deepest affliction. Unable to endure his home under the first impressions of distress, he hastened to Rome, and, as a farther means of lightening his melancholy, began the composition of a tragedy. This occupation of his mind, and the distinctions conferred upon him at the Court of Leo X., filled with men of letters, lessened his gloom, and after a short residence in the Pontifical capital, he resolved to escape from the unsettled mode of life to which it exposed him, and return to Vicenza.

But there a new discomfit awaited him. He found his

revenues endangered by the refusal of some neighbouring districts to pay certain imposts on their lands, anciently assigned to the family of the Trissini. By great interest at Rome, and the interference of the pontiff, he obtained the restitution of his rights, and was enabled to compose his mind to study. But scarcely had he resumed his former mode of life, when Leo, desirous of securing the services of a man so well known for his ability, sent him on a mission to the Emperor Maximilian, after seeing whom he was to visit the court of Denmark.

His success in these embassies increased his reputation with the pontiff, and acquired him at the same time the distinguished regard of the emperor.

Other public employments followed, but on the death of Leo X., in December 1521, Trissino returned to Vicenza, and again freed himself entirely to the enjoyment of literary leisure. The first fruits of this was a canzone in honour of Isabella, Marchioness of Mantua, who in return sent him a pressing invitation to her court, and desired him to undertake the education of her son. It is not known whether Trissino accepted this honourable offer, but in the May of the following year he was elected by the magistrates of Vicenza to congratulate the new Doge of Venice, the celebrated Andrea Gritti, on his entering upon office. In the same year also, the Cardinal Giulio de' Medici was advanced to the Papacy, and Trissino, who was his personal friend, wrote him a congratulatory epistle, and also composed a canzone in his praise. These marks of attention were rewarded by an immediate invitation to the Pontifical Court, at which the poet was received with the affection which he had enjoyed under Leo X.

The following year he published his tragedy of Sofonisba, and, having given this to the world, turned his

attention to a subject which has engaged the abilities of many distinguished scholars in almost every country of Europe. Considering the Italian alphabet not sufficiently copious to express the sounds of the voice, he had long thought it necessary to employ some of those belonging to the Greek, and, to convince the learned men of his time that he was correct in his ideas, he wrote to the pontiff on the subject.

"During the many years," says he, "most Blessed Father, that I have spent in considering the pronunciation of Italian, and in comparing it with the written language, I have thought the latter to be weak and faulty, and not adapted to express it. It therefore appeared to me necessary to add some letters to the alphabet, by means of which our pronunciation might in some measure be improved, and this, with the aid of God, I did, as may be seen in my Poetics and Treatise on Grammar." He then proceeds to the exposition of his theory, and observes that the letters for which he first claims admission into the Italian alphabet are the Greek η and ω , there being of the vowels e and o two pronunciations, for the expression of which a single character is insufficient. He adds, that the proper application of these new signs would wonderfully assist towards the attainment of the Tuscan and Court (Cortigiana) pronunciation, the most admirable, without doubt in Italy. The next character he introduces is the z , which he observes has two sounds, sometimes that of a g , at others that of c , and completes his design by proposing to prevent the confusion resulting from the vowels i and u being sometimes used as consonants, by introducing j and v , thus on the whole increasing the alphabet by the addition of five new characters; the three first

mentioned being of the highest importance, and the last two useful, but of less consequence.

He was thus the first to bring the question before the public; but the same idea, it appears, had some few years before been started by the academicians of Siena, and though his theory was praised for its ingenuity, and he had the merit of priority in publishing it, he obtained little encouragement, and had, in the words of Castelli, more flatterers than followers.

From these literary pursuits his attention was again called in 1525, by the posture of public affairs. Francis I. having been taken prisoner at Pavia, the Pope soon after found it necessary to enter into negotiations, which the talents and long experience of Trissino rendered him peculiarly qualified to conduct.

The next five years was a troubled period for all who were in any way engaged in public affairs, and there can be little doubt that Trissino experienced a full share of the alarm so general in 1527, when the head of the Catholic Church was torn from his palace, and made a prisoner by the arm of a temporal sovereign. Certain it is, that when the storm passed away, he was among the first who participated in the returning prosperity of the pontiff; and on the arrival of Charles at Bologna, in order to be solemnly crowned King of Lombardy and Emperor of the Romans, our poet was in attendance on Clement, and bore his train at the ceremony of the coronation.

But he had now arrived at the age of fifty-two; had passed an active, and, in some respects, a laborious life, and though neither his years were sufficiently numerous, nor the cares which he had experienced of a nature greatly to oppress him, yet to a man desirous of preserving himself from the worst infirmities of age, his

present condition afforded a warning that it was time for him to retire from the bustle of public life.

Trissino, who appears to have possessed more prudence than the generality of his brother bards, sedately obeyed its monitions, and, taking his leave of the Pope, repaired to his seat at Vicenza. His first care on reaching home was to terminate the vexatious lawsuits which had so long troubled him, and, after some few months' farther litigation, he succeeded in finally settling the dispute with his refractory neighbours. But distresses of a different and still more harassing nature speedily followed. His second wife was Bianca, a daughter of Niccolò Trissino, and the widow of Alvise Trissino. By the poet she had a son and a daughter, and by her former husband a son who was still living, and her maternal anxiety for whose welfare had suffered no diminution from her second marriage. Giulio, Trissino's eldest son, who was now arch-Priest of the cathedral church of Vicenza, was, notwithstanding his ecclesiastical profession, surly and avaricious. Considering the affectionate conduct of Bianca towards her son as an injury to himself, he lost no opportunity of thwarting her designs. The lady was little inclined to suffer the asperity of Giulio's behaviour unresented, and thus the unfortunate Trissino was placed between two fires, which only seemed to burn the quicker the more he endeavoured to extinguish them, and from which, with all his experience and political skill, he found himself unable to escape.

In the year 1540 he lost his wife Bianca, and it might have been supposed that the strife, which had for so long a time disturbed his quiet, would now cease; but instead of this being the case, the jealousy and rancour of his children were increased, and he found that his admonition and authority were both alike despised. Giulio set no

bounds to his passion, and the unfortunate father saw himself on the point of being deprived of a large part of his fortune in a suit instituted against him by his son. Unable to endure any longer the strife and ingratitude of his family, he retired to Murano, a short distance from Venice. There he enjoyed sufficient quiet to resume his literary occupations, and sit down to the completion of his celebrated, though not popular epic, the "*Italia Liberata da i Goti*." He had begun this work some time before the present period, and it was not finished till he had expended on its composition twenty years. This is a period which, in our fruitful days, when the mind is expected to be at least as productive as it is active, seems greatly too long for the production of any single work. But it shrinks into insignificance when it is remembered, that the same time was exhausted by Sannazzaro on the *De Partu Virginis*.

The *Italia Liberata* was a prodigious effort of ingenuity, for ingenuity may, perhaps, be considered the imitative faculty employed in copying mere human models, while genius is the same faculty working after the beau-ideals of the mind, or the most perfect forms that exist in nature.

Trissino, however, having completed, and cautiously corrected, the first nine books of his epic, sent them to press, and they appeared at Rome in the year 1547. He lost no time in forwarding a copy of the work, as far as it was printed, to the Emperor Charles V., who, on receiving it, expressed the highest satisfaction at the present, and signified his approbation of the poem itself, by desiring the author to let him have the remainder as speedily as possible. Trissino was in no slight degree gratified by the emperor's compliments, and immediately prepared to complete the remaining books, his success

with those already printed having the effect of stimulating him to still greater care in polishing and correcting those not yet published. By the following year the remaining books were printed, and he instantly forwarded them, with all the anxiety of a young author eager to reap the first harvest of fame, to the emperor. Praise as flattering as that bestowed on the former occasion was the reward of the poet's toils, or, as it might, perhaps, be said with more truth, of his fidelity and homage to the imperial critic.

But, notwithstanding the time and pains which had been employed upon the *Italia Liberata da i Goti*—notwithstanding the reputation already enjoyed by its author; and though, above all, he had been the friend of successive pontiffs, and was a favourite with the emperor, the poem was not free from the attacks of many severe critics, some of whom, that nothing might escape them, began with the title, which, on the one hand, was said to be too long, and on the other, not sufficiently clear. It was next objected that the dialogues were wearisome and badly managed, it being an offence against probability to represent persons making long and formal speeches in the midst of battles. Another objection was in respect to the time which the action occupied. It would have been better, it was remarked, if the story had commenced at a later period of the war, that is, when Belisarius arrived at Rome, or, at least, in Italy; and also if it had been kept free from the love adventures of Justinian, the recital of which was unworthy of the main subject. The last objection has given rise to some controversy among Italian critics. It having been observed by Fontanini*, that Trissino inserted some things in his

* *Bibliotheca della Eloquent. Ital.*

poem which merited great censure, but afterwards, like a good Christian, being convinced of his error, amended or changed the verses, his annotator remarks, that he spent a long time in endeavouring to discover where the changes above mentioned were made; and for that purpose examined a great variety of copies, but all in vain. "Nor should I ever," he continues, "have been able to satisfy myself, had not Signor Giuseppe Farsetti lent me a copy which contained the corrected passages, and the whole of which, to my no little surprise, were no more than three, the alterations in which consisted of only a few words." It would have been infinitely better, concludes Zeno, if, "as a good Christian and Catholic, Trissino had not scandalised the Church by calumniating the holy Pontiff Silverius."*

While Trissino was thus occupied with his poem, or with the critics who attacked it, his son Giulio was resolutely pressing his claims upon the estate. Irritated, as was natural, at this treatment, he made a will, by which he disinherited Giulio, and named Ciro the sole heir to his fortune; but scarcely was this done, when he heard, to his surprise and indignation, that a sentence had been passed in the court where the cause was tried, which at once deprived him of the greater part of his possessions. Full of resentment, and disgusted with his country, where he felt that he had only met with strife and injury, he sought an interview with the emperor at Trent. This was graciously accorded him. From Trent he proceeded to Mantua, and thence, notwithstanding his age and infirmities, to Rome. There he received the marks of honour and regard shown him in former years,

* Apos. Zeno. Note al Fontanini.

and after a brief enjoyment of the consolation thus afforded him, died lamented in the year 1550.

Trissino merits a distinguished station among the learned men of his age. His acquaintance with the classics was extensive, and in his habits of study he was patient and laborious. Before writing the "*Italia Liberata*," he read, it is said, every work that could be procured which embraced any notice of the classical ages, or served to illustrate the history or manners of the times; and, in speaking of his anxiety to make his treatise on poetry as useful and correct as possible, he says, "I have spared no fatigue; besides the '*Volgare Eloquenza*' of Dante, and the '*Regole of Antonio da Tempo*,' I have read almost all the ancient *Trovatori*, Sicilian, Italian, Provençal, and Spanish, which could be obtained; and I shall think little of this fatigue if I may thereby have satisfied those many ingenious foreigners who are desirous of information on the subject." *

Of the "*Italia Liberata*" and the "*Sofonisba*," it only remains to be said, that they were the first Italian poems written in blank verse.† His other poetical productions consist of sonnets and canzoni, of which the former were described by a contemporary writer as clear, sententious, and pathetic, while the latter obtained attention as presenting the first imitation of the Pindaric Ode seen in Italian.

The prose works of our author, besides those already mentioned, consist of his oration addressed to Andrea Gritti, two elegant dialogues, under the titles "*Il Castellano*" and "*I Ritratti*," and an epistle on the life which should be led by a widow.

Among the contemporaries of Trissino, GIOVANNI RU-

* De la Poetica. Opere, ii. p. 92.

† Zeno al Fon.

CELLAI, his friend and associate, distinguished himself as one of the earliest reformers, or authors, of Italian tragedy. He was the descendant of an ancient and noble Florentine family, and was born in the month of October 1475. It is not known to whom his education was first intrusted, but he studied during his youth under Francesco Gattoni da Diacceto, and acquired an extensive acquaintance with the Latin and Greek classics. Being related on the mother's side to the Medici, his family connections united with his abilities to introduce him, at an early period, to public employments, and in 1505 he was sent ambassador to Venice. He is supposed to have taken an active part in the restoration of the Medici, and to have been among the noblemen by whose exertions that event was brought about in the year 1512. As a reward for his attachment, Lorenzo promoted him to several lucrative employments, and, on being made Captain-General of the Pontifical army, took him to Rome. Leo X. treated him with great affection, and on visiting Florence, spent some time with him in his garden, much celebrated for its beauty and extent, and heard him recite his tragedy of "Rosmunda." Nor was the Pontiff's esteem for him evidenced only by such attentions as these; he put him on the list of those whom he intended to promote to the rank of cardinal, and would, it is believed, have carried this intention into execution, but for the envy of other members of his family. As some compensation for the disappointment which Rucellai felt at finding his hopes of advancement so long deferred, Leo sent him ambassador to France, but died soon after the poet had reached his place of destination. When, after the short pontificate of Adrian, Clement VII. ascended the throne, Rucellai was again flattered with the hopes of advancement to the highest dignities

of the Church. Nor would he have been disappointed, had he not allowed himself to consider the rank of cardinal as alone sufficient to reward his services. Having previously received some other valuable appointments, he was made Governor of the castle of St. Angelo, in which situation he died. This event occurred shortly before Rome was besieged by the Imperialists; and his eulogists observed, "that heaven thereby saved him from the misery which he must have suffered from such a spectacle, and from being obliged either to act as gaoler to his revered relative, or to be made a prisoner in the castle himself." *

Among other poets of a secondary class who flourished at or near this period, were BROCCARDO, and FRANCESCO MARIA MOLZA, both of them men of genius, but prevented from producing anything sufficient to establish their reputation, the one by an early death, the other by the unsettled and lavish manner in which he passed his life. Broccardo was bred to the law, but could never subdue that passion for poetry which seemed to form an element of his nature. The fruits of the hours which he stole from his studies were several miscellaneous pieces, which, on account of their merit, found their way into different publications. But either the praise which attended these first attempts of his muse, or the too high opinion he had formed of his own powers, led him into an error which not only blighted his hopes of literary renown, but caused his death. Trusting to his wit, or to the flattery which he had received as a young man of ability, he ventured to attack Cardinal Bembo, in this quarrel with whom Bernardo Tasso was on the point of being involved. But the reputation of the cardinal rested much

* *Giornale de' Letterati.*

too securely on the prevailing taste of the day to suffer from the attacks of such an opponent, and poor Broccardo not only saw the object of his satire escape without harm, but found himself exposed to the general laugh and scorn of the literary public. The pride and vivacity of youth were sufficient to buoy him up while making the bold attempt to rival a cardinal, but they entirely forsook him when he saw that he was treated with ridicule; and after a short struggle with his feelings, he was attacked by a disorder which speedily proved fatal.

Molza lived longer, and wrote more, but fell a victim to his dissipated pleasures.

Ippolito de' Medici and Alessandro Farnese were his successive protectors, and, considering his abilities and connections, there is little doubt but that he might have advanced himself both in fortune and reputation. He resided for some years at Rome, but while he was regarded as the chief ornament of academies, and could delight the most accomplished circles with his conversation, he was almost reduced to want. He at length returned to Modena, his native city, where he died in February 1544. The poems of Molza, which have obtained great praise both for elegance of style and richness of fancy, were printed with those of Broccardo in 1538 at Venice.

FRANCESCO BERNI.

FRANCESCO BERNI was the descendant of a noble but impoverished family. His birth occurred at Lamporecchio, in the Vale of Mevole, about the year 1490.*

Having received his education at Florence, he was sent to Rome to enjoy the patronage of his near relative, the Cardinal Bibbiena. But the cardinal rendered him little service. As little was done for him by the inheritor of the cardinal's fortune, and worn out with the indifferent treatment which he had received from his relatives, he attached himself to the Court of the Pope, in the character of Secretary to the Pontifical Datary.

Though the new situation in which Berni had thus placed himself was neither more advantageous, nor the employment less irksome, than that of attending to the caprices of his powerful relative, he remained secretary to the datary seven years, spending part of his time at Rome, and part at Verona, of which see his master, Giamp Matteo Giberti, was bishop. He had already entered, it appears, the ecclesiastical profession, but had made little advance towards acquiring the wealth or dignities which had been enjoyed by his kinsmen. There

* Mazzuchelli, *Scritt. d'Italia*.

were, however, two great hindrances to his success besides the indifference or neglect of his patrons; he was unconquerably indolent, and he was a versifier. But, unsuccessful as he was as a candidate for profitable employments, he was greatly admired for the liveliness of his disposition, the elegance of his poems, which he was accustomed to recite before his friends, and the brilliancy and variety of his conversation. He thus acquired considerable popularity, and was regarded as one of the chief personages in the *Accademia de' Vignaiuoli*, composed of the most respectable and distinguished men of Rome. This learned association was founded by a gentleman named Oberto Strozzi. Its members took poetical names, and one was known as *Il Mosto*, another as *L'Agresto*, and a third as *Il Corogno*, and so on. But the *Accademia de' Vignaiuoli* was as famed for its convivial festivals as for the erudition of its members; and Berni, in his facetious epistles, alludes more than once to the rich banquets he enjoyed with his brother academicians. A letter is quoted by Tiraboschi*, in which *Il Mauro* describes a meeting of this kind, and which he designates as a supper made for the poets, and given by Signor Mussetola, on the eve of St. Lucia. "I, as a poet," says the writer, "was present, and no other wine was drunk but that of the vineyards of Pontano, which was brought by post from Naples. So much poetic virtue had it in itself, that we all grew warm, not by looking at it, but by tasting and drinking it, and that seven or eight times, and more, each of us; and such was the effect of it that it made me one of the Muses. . . . One M. Marco da Lodi, at the conclusion of the supper, sang to his lyre, as did also M. Pietro Polo. . . ." In the dedication of a

* Storia, t. vii. lib. i. p. 145.

work to Strozzi, the Academy is represented under a somewhat graver aspect: "You were no sooner arrived at Rome," says the writer, Marco Sabino, "than your house was consecrated to the Muses, and became the rendezvous of all the most famous academicians at the court, who almost every day assembling there, as it were in consistory, Berni brought his excellent bon-mots, Mauro his abstract pleasantries, Monsignor della Casa his ever ready and ingenious conceits, Lelio Capiluppo, the Abate Firenzuolo, Francesco Bini, and the amiable Giovo da Lucca, with many others, their delightful fancies, and sweetly conversed in your company, and in your musical banquets, referring all things to the judgment of two censors. Thither also came the wonderful improvisatori G. B. Strozzi, Pero, Niccolò Franciotti, and Cesare da Fano, who sang at the instant on any subject proposed to them, and did not more astonish than delight us!"

Berni was a spectator in the month of September 1526, of the furious attack made on Rome by the Colonna. In a letter written soon after the event by Girolamo Negro, the circumstances of the assault are described with great particularity and vigour; and, after relating the destruction of the most splendid apartments in the Papal palace, with all their valuable furniture, the writer mentions that Berni was a sufferer among the rest. "All the apartments of the corridor were broken open and destroyed, except that of Campeggio, which was defended by some Spaniards, who pretended they had taken possession of it. Ridolfi's was wholly ruined. The datary saved a good part of his property in the castle, but has notwithstanding suffered great loss; among other things, porcelain of the most beautiful kind was broken, to the value of six hundred ducats. The apartments del Para-

diso were all destroyed. . . . So also those of the Vicar of our Lord, up to the very chamber of Alcionio. Berni, whose lodging adjoins it, was stripped of everything : and besides carrying away his clothes and furniture, they seized a large pile of letters directed to the datary, to whom Berni is secretary ; but hearing some one, I do not know who, cry *Chiesa! chiesa!* they left them behind.”*

During his long attendance on the Roman Court, the only close intimacy he formed with men of power was that with the Cardinals Niccolò and Ridolfi, and with his master Giberti, whom he appears to have treated with undeviating esteem and regard. He was sent by that prelate into Abruzzo, to superintend the concerns of one of his abbeys there, to which circumstance he alludes in a letter to Francesco Bini†, in which he laughingly assures his friend that he knows what it is to govern. In company with Giberti he also made several journeys, and spent a considerable time at Verona, to which city he frequently alludes in his works, at one time lavishing upon it the most glowing praise, and at another laughing at its inhabitants. It was there that he composed, it is said, the chief part of his “Rifacimento,” and the lines in which he speaks of this circumstance, are sweet and elevated :—

Tu che per l' alto, largo e chiaro letto
 Ratto correndo fai grato romore,
 Raffrena il corso tuo veloce alquanto
 Mentre alle ripe tue scrivendo io canto.
 Rapido Fiume che d' alpestre vena
 Impetuosamente a noi discendi,
 E quella Terra sopr' ogn' altra amena
 Per mezzo, a guisa di meandro, fendi :
 Quella che di valor, d' ingegno è piena
 Per cui tu con più lume, Italia, splendi,

* Lettere di Principi. Ven. 1581.

† Lett. Facete, raccolte per Atanagi.

Di cui la fama in te chiara risuona
Eccelsa, graziosa, alma Verona.

Quella, nel cui leggiadro amato seno
Mentre io sto questi versi miei cantando
Dal ciel benigno a lei sempre e sereno
Tanto piglio di buon quanto fuor mando :
E nel fecondo suo lieto terreno
Allargo le radici, e' rami spando,
Qual sterile arbuscel frutto produce
Se in miglior terra, e cielo altri il conduce.
Lib. ii. Can. i. St. 5, &c.

Thou, who thy channell'd bed, broad, clear, and deep,
With grateful murmur hurrying pour'st along,
Not thus upon thy course so swiftly sweep,
While to thy shores I frame and pen my song!
Thou rapid stream, whose fount impetuous swells
From the cleft Alps, how beauteous is the land
Through which, meander-like, thou wind'st—there dwells
Of virtue and the Muse the sacred band
That wreathes with light, proud Italy, thy name,
And thee, bright, loved Verona! consecrates to fame.

That beauteous land! upon whose fragrant breast
While thus at ease I meditate my strain,
From her blue skies, with calm for ever blest,
My heart more good than it can give will gain;
And on her plains, with fertile beauty drest,
My roots increase, my branches spread again,
Even as transplanted to more genial lands
The sterile tree revives, and with new bloom expands.

In a letter written during his residence at Verona, we find him alluding to his wearisome occupation. "My Signor Bini," says he, "you must be content to give me licence to write no more, for I have been writing all the morning;"* and in one of the stanzas of the "Innamorato," he describes himself as perpetually burdened with letters, some crowded into his bosom, and others under his arms, while his brains were almost spent with unceasing correspondence. Venice, Padua, and the south of France, were

* Lettere, raccolte dall' Atanagi.

also visited in obedience to the directions of his master ; and considering that a hatred of all fatigue formed the prominent feature of his character, it is not surprising that he at length grew weary of so much travelling and writing, and sought his dismissal from the post of secretary to the datary.

The only reward he had received for his long and patient self-denial in the service of Giberti, was a canonry at Florence, and notwithstanding his attachment to the bishop, he was not backward in expressing his discontent at such a poor return for his fidelity. A man, however, whose chief good is the indulgence of rest, and perfect freedom to enjoy his books and his dinner, is far better prepared to meet the disappointments of a courtier than one whose ambition is greater than his hopes. Berni, therefore, quietly resigning himself to his lot, bade his master adieu, and repaired to Florence, where his main object was to amuse himself in the best manner his income would allow. But his reputation as a poet, and his late connection with the Pontifical Court, recommended him to the notice of the Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici, and his cousin the Duke Alexander. Zillioli, as cited by Mazzuchelli, says that Berni passed his time very pleasantly, conversing with the numerous literary men who were ambitious of his acquaintance, and contenting himself with the faithful and sedulous attention of his faithful *Fantesca*, and one footman.

Having given a fanciful account of his mode of life, he adds the following sketch of his personal appearance:—

Di persona era grande, magro e schietto;
Lunghe e sotil le gambe forte aveva,
E 'l naso grande, e 'l viso largo e stretto
Lo spazio, che le ciglia divideva:
Concavo l' occhio aveva, azzurro e netto.
La barba folta quasi il nascondeva,

Se l' avesse portata, ma il padrone
Aveva con le barbe aspra quistione.

His frame was large but spare, nor void of grace,
And his long supple limbs were strong though thin,
Large was his nose, meagre and straight his face,
And small the line his arching brows between:
He had a clear blue eye, but in its place
So deeply set, that it had hidden been
By the curled beard, which gained unfair dimension,
Till by its master clipped, with angry question.

His manner of living, however, gave rise to many and very serious accusations, and there are few vices of the worst kind with which Berni was not charged. Except the caution with which all such common accusations should be received, especially when preferred against a man whose careless disposition and indolence would expose him as much to slander as to vice, there is little, it may be feared, to be said in apology for his general conduct. His hatred to the Duke Alexander led to atrocious accusations of dark plots of proposed poisonings and assassinations. Berni had too much love of ease, and was of far too kindly a nature, to harm any one except in verse. With this weapon he was really a savage, as may be seen by some lines addressed to the duke:—

Empio signor, che de la roba altrui
Lieto ti vai godendo, e del sudore,
Venir ti possa un canchero nel cuore,
Che ti porti di peso a i regni bui.
E venir possa un canchero a colui,
Che di quella città ti fe' signore,
E s' egli è altri che ti dia favori,
Possa venir un canchero anche a lui.

Impious lord ! another's robe thou wear'st;
The sweat of others is thy joy and stay:
May that vile heart thou in thy bosom bear'st
A cancer crush, and thee to hell convey:
And may another cancer on him prey,
Who made thee signor here; and if beside
One favours thee, a cancer him betide.

If refinement of language, combined with imagery unknown to previous writers, can give an author a claim to originality, Berni deserves the praise of having founded a new school of poetry. But for the honour, not only of poetry, but of genius itself, it should never be forgotten, that there is a great and essential difference between the sparkling wit of a writer like Berni, and that rich humour which is so often the accompaniment of much higher powers of mind. Berni was a scholar, had a good ear, was well skilled in the *Lingua Cortigiana*, could rhyme with facility, and loved at his heart both mirth and satire. His verses derive their superiority from this union of excellent qualities for a burlesque poet, but they have little in them to give relief to the glare of wit with which they are suffused, except some learned or satirical allusion, not always intelligible. Laugh we must at the ludicrous picture which he has left of himself, swimming in his bed six yards wide, sucking soups and jellies through a pipe, because to use his teeth was too great a labour; and counting the beams in the ceiling of his room, in all possible ways, for amusement. But however we may laugh at this at the first reading, we find, at the second, little more than the picture of a lazy fellow, more lazy than ordinary. What is worse, the same picture is again and again presented us in different poems of the author, and we must have a great appetite for the ludicrous, if we become not weary of his intolerable repetitions on the subject of his indolence, his hatred of disturbance, and his love of good cheer. Even in his letters, his facetiousness is continually resolving itself into this topic; and with all his ingenuity and good taste, Berni seems to have clung to his own picture as his best study on all occasions, and never to have suspected that a wit who is constantly

talking of himself, is not less tiresome, after a little time, than any other egotist.

The work on which the extensive reputation of Berni chiefly rests is his "Rifacimento" of Boiardo's "Orlando Innamorato," a production which has had the singular success of rendering the original poem, of which it is a revision, almost obsolete. The object which Berni proposed to himself in revising the "Orlando," has been differently stated by different authors. By some, he is supposed to have formed the idea of rivalling Ariosto, while others, and with more probability, assert that he only intended to improve the antiquated and unclassical language of Boiardo, and, by interspersing it with strokes of humour, give it the life and animation in which it was originally wanting.*

Berni's undertaking was far less venturous than that of another poet, Niccolò degli Agostini. Not condescending to confine himself to the humble task of improving Boiardo's versification or language, he at once determined to rival him in invention, from which the lively Berni modestly shrank, or never attempted but in jest. Thirty-three new cantos, however, were produced, and added to the original "Orlando Innamorato." They seem to have been consigned to oblivion as soon as published.

Berni has been followed by a host of imitators, whose style has received, from the name of the founder of the school, the appellation of Bernesche. Lord Byron, who seems to have been a careful reader of the Italian comic poets, and translated part of Pulci's "Morgante Maggiore," may be regarded as one of Berni's scholars.

* An interesting and skilful analysis is given of Berni's "Rifacimento" in Panizzi's edit. of Boiardo. Pickering, 1830, vol. ii. cx.

ALAMANNI.

LUIGI ALAMANNI was born at Florence on the 28th of October, 1495. His early years were spent in the university of his native city, where his taste for literature was first displayed by the composition of light and agreeable verses. In the garden of Bernardo Rucellai, one of the most delicious retreats that philosophers ever enjoyed, he was permitted, while still a youth, to share in the discussions of such men as Macchiavelli, Buondelmonti, Francesco Vettria, and the still more admired Giovan-Giorgio Trissino.

By the interest which his father possessed with the Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, his friends indulged the hope of his speedy rise in public employments; but this hope proved vain. The wearing of arms had been prohibited by the cardinal. Luigi considered himself, as connected with the court, exempt from this decree. Being taken, late one evening, carrying his sword as usual, he was condemned to pay the appointed fine, or suffer some worse punishment. His anger knew no bounds, and as he was not the only Florentine of rank who had reason to be discontented with the cardinal, he found little difficulty in forming a party to encourage his resentment. Among the foremost were his literary friends Zanobi Buondelmonti, Jacopo da Diacceto

and others, and the plot having been fully arranged, they resolved, by putting the cardinal to death, to free their country from what they considered a state of disgraceful servitude. The conspirators, however, could not depend on their own exertions solely for the success of the enterprise, and a messenger from one of their principal confederates being intercepted, the plot was discovered. Jacopo da Diacceto was soon after taken, and being put to a public examination, no doubt remained as to the chief movers of the insurrection. Fortunately for them, intelligence arrived at Buondelmonti's, in whose grounds they were met for consultation, sufficiently early to allow of their escape. Alamanni happened at the time to be a short distance out of town, but receiving the tidings by one of his friends, he fled without loss of time into the territory of the Duke of Urbino, and from thence to Venice, where he met many of his associates, and was hospitably entertained with them in the house of the senator Carlo Capello.

Finding, after taking part in many public affairs, that the state of Florence remained unimproved, he resolved upon seeking the favour of Francis I., who was known to be passionately fond of Italian poetry, and a general favourer of learned men. Alamanni was received by the king with great respect, and by his munificent patronage was enabled to cultivate his genius without interruption. The fruits of the leisure thus enjoyed, appeared in 1532, under the title of "*Opere Toscane*," and with a dedication to Francis.

In the following year, on the marriage of the Duke of Orleans with Catherine de' Medici, he was appointed by the latter Master of the Household, and not long after manifested his gratitude for this promotion by presenting his royal mistress with his poem entitled "*Coltivazione*."

For six years he remained in France, without revisiting any part of Italy ; but from some lines in one of his sonnets, it appears that he had then the gratification of repassing the Alps, and beholding the scenes which had been rendered still dearer by his exile. "I thank God," says he, "that I turn my steps to see thee at least once more, after six years' absence, superb Italia !"

The years 1538 and 1539 were passed in Rome, as also the former part of 1540. In 1544 he was sent ambassador from Francis I. to the Emperor Charles V., then in Spain. This mission was a formidable undertaking. He had written, during the war between the two monarchs, some verses which expressed the bitterest dislike of the Emperor, and were well known to have reached his ears. Among the rest were these lines —

L'Aquila grifagna
Che per più divorar due becchi porta.

The savage eagle,
Armed with two beaks the better to devour.

On arriving at the Spanish court, he was admitted to a morning's audience, and in the presence of a large number of the greatest personages of the realm, delivered an oration in praise of the sovereign. Unfortunately, several of the sentences began consecutively with the word "aquila," and when the address was brought to a close, the Emperor quietly added,

" L'Aquila grifagna
Che per più divorar due becchi porta."

Alamanni never gave better proof of his wit, or of his self-possession as a courtier, than now. Instead of being struck dumb with confusion, he replied with a grave countenance, "In those lines, most magnanimous prince, I spoke as a poet, whose privilege it is to invent ; now I

reason as an ambassador, in whom it would be disgraceful to utter anything false, and especially when I am sent from so sincere and holy a prince as mine, to a prince so sincere and holy as your Majesty. Formerly I wrote as a youth, now I speak as an old man; then full of disdain and anger at being exiled from my country; now free from every passion, and assured that your Majesty intended no injustice: then filled with false information, now informed by the infinite experience of what I have seen and heard in my commerce with the world." Charles had the good sense to be perfectly satisfied with this apology, and laying his hand on the orator's shoulder, said, "that he much lamented the events at Florence, which had occasioned the exile of so excellent a person, but that there was the less to regret, since he had by that means obtained the patronage of the great and generous Francis; every land, moreover, being the country of a virtuous man." To these gracious words the Emperor added some rich presents, and dismissed the ambassador delighted with his reception, and with the courtesy with which he had been treated not only by the sovereign but by his nobles. On his return, he was rewarded by Francis with new grants, bestowed on him and his son. The accession of Henry II. to the throne, made no change in his position. He was treated by that monarch with the same regard as by the heroic Francis. The young king, after presenting him with a large gold ornament, desired him to complete the poem of "*Girone il Cortese*," begun some time before, and which he finished and published with a dedication to Henry in 1548. His death occurred at Amboise on the 18th of April, 1556.

The works of Alamanni are "*Opere Toscane*," consisting of elegies, divided into four books, of which the first three are amatory, and the fourth devotional.

Eclogues, written in imitation of Theocritus, and in blank verse, which he is said to have been among the first to bring into use, Trissino being allowed to have the better claim to originality. Sonetti, Ballate, and Canzone; Favole, Satire, and the Salmi Penitenziali, form the remainder of the first volume of the "Opere Toscane." The second consists of "Selve," divided into three books, and written in blank verse; of the "Favola di Fetonte;" and the Tragedy of Antigone, merely a translation from that of Socrates of the same name, but done in so admirable a style, that it is generally praised by Italian critics. There are also Hymns, composed in imitation of Pindar, and which have obtained Alamanni the reputation of being the first to introduce that species of poem among his countrymen, with the classical divisions of strophe, anti-strophe, and epode, named by him ballata, contra-ballata, and stanza.

The other works of Alamanni are, 1. "La Coltivazione," considered as one of the most excellent poems that Italy has produced in the secondary class of composition. It is in blank verse, and an intended imitation of Virgil's Georgics, which it is said by its admirers as sometimes to equal, and in one or two passages to surpass. 2. "Girone il Cortese," supposed to be little more than a poetical version of the old French romance of the same name, which the author mentions as the foundation of the work in his dedication to Henry: it was, however, never much esteemed. 3. L'Avarchide, which derived its name from Avariam, the ancient appellation of the city of Bourges, the capital of Berri, and the siege of which forms the subject of the poem. Like the Girone il Cortese, it met with no success, owing perhaps not so much to the author's want of poetical fervour, as to his absurd pretensions of imitating Homer. 4. Flora, a comedy, equally

unesteemed. 5. Epigrams, consisting of 122 Italian decasyllabics. 6. Orazione. 7. Rime, or miscellaneous pieces, which are to be found in several collections of fugitive poetry, edited at various times by different Italian scholars. 8. Lettere, of which, it is to be regretted, very few only remain. And, lastly, some remarks on Homer, which were sufficiently esteemed to be published in the Cambridge edition of 1689.

BATTISTA GUARINI.

THE name of Battista Guarini holds a conspicuous place among those of the celebrated men whose genius shed so great a splendour over the Court of Ferrara. He was born in the year 1537, and was the son of Francesco Guarini and the Countess Orsola Baldassare Macchiavelli. His ancestor, Guarino Guarini, removed from Verona to Ferrara in the middle of the fourteenth century, and was appointed to the professorship of the Greek language and literature by Niccolò III., Marquis of Este.* He performed the duties of this office with great reputation, and was regarded by his contemporaries as one of the most accomplished scholars of the time. Little is known of the early life of Battista. He is said to have passed three years at the University of Padua, but in 1557 he was appointed to a professorship in his native place.

Ferrara at this period was as famous for the learning of its university, as for the lustre of its court. The wars of Alfonso I. had compelled that prince to contract his domestic expenses, and consent to dismiss many of the professors; but Ercole II. restored the university to its former flourishing condition†, and philosophers and

* Barotti, *Scrit. Ferrares.*

† Tiraboschi. t. vii. lib. i. p. 119.

learned men from all parts of Europe, from England among the rest, frequented and lectured in its schools. Thus while war raged in other quarters of Italy, and numerous academies were suppressed or neglected, that of Ferrara formed the asylum of the exiled professors, and reaped the advantage of their united abilities.

Guarini was soon regarded as the most accomplished orator of the age, and his lectures on poetry and rhetoric became universally popular.

Alfonso, admiring his abilities, sent him in 1567 on a mission to Venice. He was afterwards entrusted with embassies to Savoy, to Rome, and to Poland. On his return from the latter country, he was made a Secretary of State, and then again despatched to Warsaw, to take advantage of any circumstances which might favour Alfonso's pretensions to the Polish Crown. His mission was unavailing, but he preserved the credit of his master uninjured, and Alfonso professed great admiration of the talents by which his pride had been thus kept from receiving any wound. But the poet had many enemies. During his journeys, the most active measures were taken to ruin his hopes of advancement, and he had not only to contend with the violent fatigues to which he was necessarily exposed, but with the harassing suspicion that, labouring as he was for his prince, he would be finally suffered to die neglected. Allusion is probably made to these circumstances in scene 1, act v. of the *Pastor Fido*, where Guarini is supposed to lament his lot under the character of Carino.

Completely wearied with disappointment, and finding that, instead of improving his circumstances by living at court, he was ruining his own moderate fortune, he resolved to retire from Ferrara, and endeavour to content himself in the bosom of his family. In 1582, accordingly,

he requested his dismissal of the duke, and proceeded to his estate in the Polesine of Rovigo, named La Guarina, after his great grandfather, to whom it was granted by Duke Borso, in reward of his services as ambassador to France. But a trial was necessary to defend his right to possession. He had also to endure the burden of numerous debts; while a family of eight children, some of whom regarded him with little affection, contributed still further to ruin his hopes of repose.

In a letter written from Venice, where he was prosecuting his lawsuit, and addressed to Cornelio Bentivoglio, who had married his wife's sister, he thus describes his melancholy condition :—"They who complain of me," says he, 'remember not my complaints, or what I have so often sail of my hard fortune, caused, as is well known, not by an indolent or vicious life, but by all the evils with which heaven and earth can overwhelm the miserable father of a family, evils caused by a most laborious and fruitless servitude of fourteen long years, through which my affairs have fallen into confusion, and I have lost the means of paying my debts, and providing for the necessities of a large and badly-conducted family.' After having mentioned that he scarcely could consider himself a poet, and that he had much more important occupations to pursue than writing verses, he continues; "to settle controversies, to sustain actions, to look out for money, to treat with creditors, to make bargains, to form contracts, these are the objects which now fill my mind. My companions are imposing lawyers, lying proctors; perilous tribunals, importunate officials, perfidious brokers, covetous men, credulous persons, suspicious spirits; offers which come and go; hopes to-day flourishing and to-morrow withered; necessity always green; accounts from home always troublesome; demands

always pressing, want of money, and still greater want of friends and fidelity. Amid all these distresses and miseries, does your excellency think that I can invite the Muses to me, or that if I did, they would inhabit a soul so agitated as mine? The Muses are young, gay, happy, nor do they willingly remain where there is trouble; and therefore, poetry is very like love, which is nothing more than a kind of thoughtless thought, (*pensiero spensierato*), an idle business, or as it is said, a care without mind. Thus poetry, what is it but a sensible madness, and a distraction of the brain, which it renders so insensible, that it often happens, that they who have brains forget they have any, and they who have none, think they have them in abundance. From which most grievous misfortune I will guard myself with all my strength." In the same strain he observes, that Augustus and Mæcenas, and other patrons of poets, bestowed greater gifts on them than on men of science and learning, not because they held them in higher esteem, but because, while the latter every day increased in sense, and in capability of providing for themselves, the former lost more and more of their brains by their constant attention to dreams and chimeras, and therefore became poor, and had need of support, and some reward for the loss of their senses, which they suffered by making poetry. "But to return to myself," he continues; "I am now in my forty-fourth year, am the father of eight children, two of which are able to judge of my negligence. I have marriageable daughters; I have the burden of many debts; I have no time for idleness; I should be a madman did I not strive to bring into port what little I have saved from shipwreck."*

* Letters.

But notwithstanding the pleasure which Guarini took in ridiculing poets, and the affectation of which he was guilty in pretending to have no ambition to be ranked among the bards of his country, he was now continually engaged in the careful composition or correction of the *Pastor Fido*. After three years spent in retirement, Alfonso insisted on his return to Ferrara, and he was again employed in missions of importance. But he became embroiled in lawsuits with his eldest son; and suspecting that the Duke acted against him, he secretly took his departure, and proceeded to the Court of Savoy. From Savoy, however, he was obliged to retreat after a brief stay, alarmed, it is supposed, by the machinations of Alfonso, who was known to have a particular dislike to any of his former ministers, when in the employ of other potentates. Padua was his next asylum, and there, in December 1590, he had the misfortune to lose his fond and beloved wife. A new set of feelings now took possession of his mind. Hitherto he had seen no other means of escaping from the persecutions of fortune, but by seeking shelter in Padua or La Guarina; but now he might flee for protection to the Church; and his wife was scarcely buried, when he resolved to hasten to Rome, and assume the ecclesiastical habit. Very admirably does a passage in one of his letters show the state of his mind, when breaking from the load of his grief, it caught, with the eagerness of childhood, at the first novelty that rose in his thoughts: "This is so sudden a change and transformation of my life," says he, "that I am induced to believe it has not occurred, as indeed nothing can, without the intervention of God, who thus summons me to another vocation." But the idea of taking orders vanished with the return of his good spirits, and he would have accepted the offer of an

appointment in the archducal court at Innspruck, but for his fear of Alfonso.

While the unfortunate father was thus wandering from place to place, his son Alexander was rising rapidly in rank and influence at the court of Ferrara. Trusting to his favourable situation, and retaining no anger towards his parent, the young man ventured to beseech Alfonso to allow his father to settle himself peaceably in the service of some other prince. But the Duke haughtily denied the request, and afterwards said to the Duchess of Urbino that the son imitated the father, and cared little for his favour. Alessandro, however, was not to be thus hastily repulsed, and repeating his application, he succeeded in obtaining both his own and his father's restoration to the Duke's good opinion. The letters which Guarini wrote to Alessandro while this affair was pending, breathe doubt and suspicion in every line, and he cautions his son against snares and spies, with all the anxiety of a man who had lived the best part of his days among enemies, and who knew that whoever pursued the same kind of life must encounter an equal number.

Guarini returned to Ferrara with doubtful satisfaction. Old sources of family dispute were again laid open, and Alessandro had to regret that the efforts he had made to obtain his object were only productive of bitter contentions. The return of our poet took place in 1595, and the Duke died in 1597. Between those periods no event occurred worth recording, but in May 1598, his daughter Anna fell a victim to the jealousy of her husband. This occurrence and the neglect which he suffered at court induced him to proceed to Florence, where he was honourably received by the Grand-duke Ferdinand. But unfortunately his youngest son Guarino, whom he had sent to Pisa to complete his education, had formed an

attachment for a lady of the place, who was young and beautiful, but poor and a widow. To increase the evil, their nuptials happened to be celebrated while Ferdinand and Guarini were themselves in Pisa. No sooner was the latter made acquainted with the event, than, unable to control his anger, he charged the Duke with having encouraged his son to marry against his will, and immediately left his service. Nor did his anger cease with its first explosion. His son, it appears, was quickly reduced to a very necessitous condition, and when his brother used all his influence to obtain him assistance, the enraged father replied that he was not bound to support his son's wife; and that as he had chosen to take her, he might make the best of her poverty. A resentment still more implacable appears in his answer to the letter in which Alessandro informed him of the death of his brother Girolamo, who had also married badly, and gave an account of the measures taken to insure him a becoming burial. "You acted perfectly right," replied Guarini, "in that which respects the soul of the deceased, but I cannot praise you for what you have done for his remains. Such obsequies become the worthy only, and he was the enemy of his father, and disgraced his family. This is not right in the sight of Heaven. As he did not think that I, his father, merited obedience, I do not think that he ought to have honour from me. Justice would have changed her nature, did the base receive the respect due only to the good."

On leaving Florence, Guarini hastened to Urbino, which he left dissatisfied; and then revisiting Ferrara, was chosen by the citizens as their representative to the Roman Pontiff. The reception which he met with on this occasion, though flattering in some respects, was not without its annoyances in others. The fame of his

Pastor Fido, was now widely spread. It was, therefore, with no little distress that he heard the Cardinal Bentivoglio declare, that, "his pestilent work had done more mischief in the world than Luther, and all other impious heretics put together." However we may question the cardinal's ecclesiastical denunciation, he had good sense and good morals on his side for the substance of his remark. Guarini was, unhappily, as reckless as Ariosto in the use of amatory language.

Nothing is known respecting his life after his journey to Rome, which took place in 1605, except that he returned to Ferrara, and again and again quarrelled with Alessandro, but was as often reconciled to him. He even acceded in some degree to his intercessions in favour of his brother, who, it may be as well to mention here, lost his wife not long after the death of his father, and repaired, it is said, the fault of his youth by marrying Julia Ariosto, a lady in every way worthy of being allied with the Guarini. It appears that the poet was engaged to the last day of his life in lawsuits, mention being made of another journey to Rome undertaken on this account, and of more than one for the same purpose to Venice, in which city he died in the month of October 1612.

The Pastor Fido, on which the present literary reputation of Guarini solely rests, has enjoyed from its first appearance an extraordinary degree of applause. Its fable is more complicated than that of most pastoral dramas; many of its scenes affect the feelings more powerfully than other compositions of the kind; and the spirit and pathos of the dialogue are frequently varied by sparkling descriptions. But, notwithstanding these merits, it fails in that exquisite spirit of pure poetry which breathes in the *Aminta*, forcing upon us the feeling, that the author was a man who had other thoughts and

cares than he who was only a poet. Guarini was only deservedly censured for the licentious tone of some of his verses, and Apostolo Zeno is not sparing of reproofs.* In the lifetime of the author, the Pastor Fido had many critics, and to the objections of the principal one, Doctor Bonifacio, Guarini returned a formal answer. In one part of this apology, he says of his drama, "Is it not a spectacle for great princes and for queens? Is it not represented in all the chief cities of Italy? Though not written more than twenty years, has it not been printed twenty-eight times in Venice alone? Has it not been translated into five foreign languages?" This statement of Guarini has been confirmed by other writers, who say, that before his death it had been printed forty times, and was translated into the languages of India and Persia.

* Galleria di Minerva.

TORQUATO TASSO.



No name in the annals of literature excites deeper emotions, than those awakened by that of Torquato Tasso. Dante and Milton were men as stern in spirit as they were great in genius, and their names are pronounced with awe and veneration; that of Ariosto creates the liveliest feelings of romance; Byron's is associated with recollections which sadden the brightest vision of his genius. But not one of these names gives rise to such varied and mingled sympathies as that of Tasso. His noble intellect would have secured him a place among the guides and examples of mankind, but for the excess of his gentleness; or his whole life would have been like a dream of romance, but that it was too uniformly and darkly shadowed by affliction.

This celebrated man was born at Sorrento* on the 11th of March, 1544, shortly after his father had taken his departure with the Prince of Salerno to join the army of the Emperor. The childhood of Torquato afforded remarkable indications of mental activity. It is said that he could speak distinctly when only six

* The Abate Serassi has carefully enumerated the places which can lay any claim to the honour of Tasso's birth or education. *Vita*, Roma, 1785, lib. i. p. 21.

months old, and that there was nothing infantine in his utterance but the exceeding fineness and delicacy of its tones.* Still more strange, he manifested so few of the ordinary tempers of childhood that he resisted the common shows of tenderness on the part of his nurses, and was scarcely ever seen to laugh or weep.

At three years of age, he was placed under the care of a grave and excellent man, the learned Giovanni d'Angeluzzo. With him he acquired the elements of grammar; but when his father's banishment obliged the unhappy Portia to take up her residence in Naples, he was sent to a school, lately established by the Jesuits †, in the street del Gigante. Here his passion for learning was increased by fresh stimulants, and he was never happy but when listening to the lessons of his skilful instructors. So anxiously did he look for the hour of school, that he arose in the winter long before the day dawned, and obliged his mother to send him with a servant and lighted torch to watch the first opening of the school-house door. His progress was answerable to his industry; and with this intellectual growth were combined many signs of devout, religious feeling. Hence, he tells us, the fathers of the seminary admitted him to communion when he was only nine years old. "I did not," he says, "then understand that in the host was the real body of Christ, but the solemn rite inspired me with a new feeling of awful pleasure."

Portia's distress at the prolonged separation from Bernardo, became every day more intolerable. "I will go

* Manso; Vita di Torquato Tasso, cap. iv.

† The Jesuits were not established in Naples till 1552. Tasso was therefore not, as Manso says, four years of age, but turned of seven, when he entered their school.—TIRABOSCHI, *Storia del. Lett. Ital.* t. vii. lib. iii. p. 1250.

and live with my husband," she once exclaimed in an agony of grief, "though it be in hell." But she had no means of escape from the thralldom of her relatives, except by the sacrifice of her own and her children's fortune. Her sorrows were at length hidden in the cell of a convent, and Torquato was sent to his father at Rome. This early separation from his mother was his first great sorrow, and made an impression on his mind, never to be obliterated.

Me dal sen della madre empia fortuna
 Pargoletto divelse: ah! di que' baci,
 Ch' ella bagnò di lagrime dolenti,
 Con sospir mi rimembra, e degli ardenti
 Pregghi, che se n' portâr l' aure fugaci,
 Ch' io giunger non dovea più volto a volto:
 Fra quelle braccia accolto,
 Con nodi così stretti, e sì tenaci.
 Lasso! e seguì con mal sicure piante,
 Qual Ascanio, o Camilla, il padre errante.*

Me from my mother's breast, remembrance sore!
 A weeping child relentless fortune tore.
 Ah! still I feel her kisses bathed in tears;
 Her prayers still whisper through the waste of years:
 O could I once again her face behold,
 Might but her arms once more her child enfold!
 False all such hopes of solace to my pain:
 I trace her form through gathering shades in vain.

Bernardo was unspeakably delighted with the companionship of his son. A cousin arrived to join him in his studies; and the party lived happily together in the Palazzo di Monte Giordano, till the death of Portia involved father and son in new sorrows. By the contri-

* Canzone xxxiv.

O del grand' Appennino,
 Figlio picciolo sì, ma glorioso,
 E di nome più chiaro assai che d' onde! &c.

It was addressed to the Court of Urbino in the year 1578, at the time of his second flight from Ferrara.

vance of her uncles, Bernardo's only daughter, Cornelia, was engaged to be married to a gentleman of whom he had no knowledge. Deeply distressed, as well as irritated by this proceeding, Bernardo employed his son's youthful eloquence in an appeal to Vittoria Colonna. It was thought that her influence at Naples might hinder the further machinations of their supposed enemies. "The sorrow," said the writer of this letter, "occasioned by the loss of fortune, is hard to bear ; but the grief felt for that of blood is still less endurable. My poor father has but us two children. Fate has deprived him of his wealth, and of a wife whom he loved as his own soul. Do not, illustrious lady, permit his enemies to rob him of his daughter also."

An expected invasion of Rome by the Spanish forces obliged Bernardo, in the autumn of 1556, to send Torquato and his cousin to their relations in Bergamo. After a visit of seven months, Torquato rejoined his father, then at Pesaro, and there his accomplishments and courteous manners recommended him as a companion to the young prince Francesco. With him he pursued his studies under the learned mathematician Federigo Comandino, and made those advances in science traceable in many of his writings.

At Venice he read, in company with his father, the best authors of his own country. "When men," says Bernardo, "resign themselves too much to the study of ancient and foreign languages, they become like citizens abroad, and strangers at home." The same practical wisdom led Bernardo to wish that his son might employ his talents in some honourable profession. With this desire, he sent him to Padua, not hopeless of his eventually becoming a lawyer. The scheme utterly failed, as in the case of Ariosto. At Padua, Torquato composed his poem of

"Rinaldo." It was published, gained great praise, and he was ever after "only a poet."

It is not, however, to be supposed that because Tasso ceased from studying the law professionally, that he neglected that, or any other branch of learning, as a means of intellectual culture. Literature, in the age when he lived, was regarded with profound reverence by those who wrote, as well as by those who read. Authors were honoured as a class of men worthy of being the companions of princes, and as exercising a power higher and nobler than that by which princes rule. But they won this esteem by the value which they themselves set on their calling; and thus the writers, whose names have come down to us with glory, were men of deep and earnest study, passing their early years in the acquisition of every kind of knowledge, and their mature life in its application.

After spending some few months with a young nobleman, Annibale di Capua, Torquato was offered a studentship in the University of Bologna. That venerable seat of learning had been lately re-established under the judicious patronage of Pope Pius IV. and Pier Donati Cesi, Bishop of Narni. Tasso's eminent talents were an ornament to the newly-formed classes, and, for a time, he had every reason to rejoice in the privileges and honours liberally conferred upon him. But his studies at Bologna were brought to a sudden and unexpected close. The university had lately suffered both in its dignity and repose from a series of bitter pasquinades, levelled alike against professors and scholars, and the principal inhabitants of the city. It happened one day, that Torquato, while conversing with some members of the university, repeated a lampoon, only just discovered.* Instantly

* Serassi, lib. i. p. 114.

it struck one of the hearers that he was the author of the whole series. The suspicion found utterance in wrathful murmurs. It spread like wild-fire through the town. An appeal was made to the magistrates, and an officer hastened to Torquato's chambers to seize his papers. Indignant at such treatment, he instantly confronted his accusers before the proper authorities of the city. No doubt remained of his innocence, and he was dismissed with all proper respect. But Bologna was no longer to him the place it had been, and bidding adieu to the university which had promised him so much happiness and success, he took up his temporary abode with some relations at Castelvetro. Thence he proceeded to Ragona, and soon after to Padua, where he was elected a member of the newly-established "*Accademia degli Etereî*."*

Some idea of an epic poem on the subject of Jerusalem and Godfrey of Bouillon, had early occupied his thoughts. It now assumed a more distinct form, and to prepare himself for the design, he composed his "*Discourses on Poetry*," carefully examining the theories of critics, and the means best calculated to accomplish the proper objects of the art. Shortly after the successful publication of these discourses, he visited his father at Mantua. Bernardo received him with the liveliest expressions of paternal love. "He told me," says Torquato, "that, with all his anxiety about his own literary fame, he almost forgot that, and everything else, in his joy at my increasing reputation."

* Tiraboschi, t. vii. lib. i. p. 180. The list of the academies established in Italy occupies four closely-printed pages, of double columns, in the Index to the *Storia della Lett. Ital.*

Tasso, according to academical fashion, assumed a new name on his introduction to the society. "*Il Pentito*" was his chosen appellation. Why so, it seems difficult to explain.

It was not long after this, that Tasso received the invitation to Ferrara which so sadly determined the future character of his days. He had returned to Padua. There he was happy and respected, and his friend Sperone Speroni earnestly advised him not to accept an offer which would make him dependent upon the caprices of a court. But he and his father were poor, and there seemed no hope of preserving independence by genius without patronage.

Tasso reached Ferrara in the midst of preparations made for the arrival of Barbara, Archduchess of Austria, on the eve of marriage with the duke Alfonso. The court of Ferrara was, at this period, the most splendid in Italy; and the flower of European chivalry had assembled to grace the approaching nuptials. A young poet could not have entered the city at a happier time for the excitement of either imagination, or hope. The gayest pomps of a romantic age, tournaments, and processions, spectacles, and sumptuous banquets, furnished a perpetual succession of amusement. But in the midst of the rejoicings, news arrived of the death of the Pope, and Ferrara became silent as the grave. Tasso may have felt the change as some strange prognostic of his own future. But the event had an immediate effect upon his position. The cardinal d'Este, his recognised patron, took him in his train to Rome; and it was not till his return that he began to attract the notice of the princess Lucretia, and her sister Leonora.

The ages of these ladies have been particularly noted by Tasso's early biographers. That of Lucretia was thirty-one, and that of Leonora thirty; but their native elegance, their accomplishments and amiable dispositions, had still left the gracefulness of youth undiminished. Their mother, Renata, was a daughter of Louis XII.

King of France. Her virtues and more than ordinary mental endowments were the theme of universal praise. But she had one fault, a fault unpardonable in Ferrara. Calvin, in the course of his travels, had frequently preached in the neighbourhood ; the duchess had heard him, felt the force of his arguments and solemn eloquence, and embraced his doctrines.* Her husband would listen to no apology for heresy. Driven hastily from his presence, Renata was banished with her two little daughters into France. There, confined to an obscure fortress, she divided her time between the patient study of Scripture and the careful education of her children.

Thus brought up under the care of their admirable mother, Leonora and her sister were early imbued with the love of literature, and when, on her death, they returned to court, they soon became recognised as its best support. Tasso gratefully acknowledged their first smiles of approbation, and thus speaks of his feelings on his introduction to Leonora :—

E certo il primo dì, che 'l bel sereno
Della tua fronte agli occhi miei s'offerse,
E vidi armato spaziarvi amore,
Se non che riverenza allor converse,
E meraviglia in fredda selce il seno,
Ivi peria con doppia morte il core.†

When first I saw thy face, divinely fair,
And powerful love, all armed, lie ambushed there,
A double death my trembling heart had known,
Had fear and awe not turned it first to stone.

Strange and undefined hopes, with all the promptings of ambition, now began to take possession of his thoughts. They urged him to the accomplishment of great designs, but, at the same time, were subtle antagonists to all the

* Paul Henry, *Leben Calvins*, B. I. c. vii. † Can. xviii.

healthier exercises of his noble powers. He resumed the composition of his great poem, left untouched for more than a year. Six cantos were written in the course of a few months, and Leonora and her sister received the homage of several minor pieces written especially in their honour.

The absence of his patron at Rome, during the spring of 1566, enabled him to visit his friends in Padua. From that city he wrote to Ercole Tasso, informing him how he spent his time there, and of the publication of his sonnets, canzoni and madrigals, in the collection of the *Accademici Eterei*. His return to Ferrara was welcomed with many demonstrations of regard. One especial mark of honour proved the high estimation in which he was held by the duke and the cardinal. The persons about court were divided into three classes. Of these, the first dined in the common hall; the second, in private apartments; and the third only in the company of the princes. To this privileged class Tasso was now admitted, and his genius became every day the theme of louder praise and greater envy. From one immediate peril he was saved by the aid of his own prudence, and the good counsels of the princess Leonora. Among the ladies of the court, Lucretia Bendidio was celebrated for the beauty of her person, and the exquisite sweetness of her singing. Tasso yielded to the power of the twofold fascination. But Giambattista Pigna, who wrote the life of Ariosto, and was the duke's favourite secretary, was also in love with the sweet-voiced Lucretia. The princess saw at once the danger to which her poet would be exposed if spoken of as Pigna's rival. She warned him in time, and then, with admirable humour, showed him how to convert his praises of Lucretia into a vehicle for complimenting Pigna himself. This notable

design was accomplished by means of an ingenious commentary on the secretary's canzoni. Pigna complacently applied to himself all that was, in reality, intended for Lucretia. But neither of these pretenders to her hand succeeded in his vows. She became the wife of one of the Macchiavelli, and Tasso, in honour of her marriage, undertook to maintain a thesis, consisting of fifty axioms, "*Conclusioni Amoroze*," on the subject of love. His most skilful opponent was the lady Orsina Bertolaia Cavaletta, celebrated for her acquaintance with Platonic philosophy. According to the fashion of the age, the disputation formed part of the amusements of the court, and great was the delight of the splendid audience, especially of the princesses and their ladies, when Tasso, having proclaimed his twenty-fifth proposition, "that man loves more intensely and constantly than woman," was almost driven from the field by Orsina's torrent of arguments and eloquence.

From these courtly occupations he was suddenly called to attend his venerable father, then in his last sickness. He reached Ostiglia in time to comfort him by his presence and receive his blessing. But this event so affected him, that it was long before he recovered from the sickness which seized him on his return to Ferrara. Preparations for a journey to France, in company with his patron, contributed to rouse him from his melancholy; but young as he still was, he now began to contemplate death as not improbably near at hand. Both his apprehensions and his poverty are intimated in the will which he drew up on the eve of his departure. "Since life," says this document, "is frail and uncertain, it may please God to call me while I am on this journey to France. Should that event happen, I pray Signor Ercole to take charge of my property, and collect my sonnets and madri-

gals for publication." Among other writings to be thus preserved, were his four books on heroic poetry ; the last six stanzas of "Godfrey," and of the first two such stanzas as seemed least faulty. His general instructions were, that his friends might burn whatever of his writings they thought unworthy of preservation, but that they must neither add to nor alter any. "As for my robes," he says, "they are in pledge to Abram for twenty-five lire. I have also seven pieces of tapestry in pledge to Signor Ascanio. Let these, and some others in the house, be sold, and the money applied to pay the expense of placing the subjoined inscription on my father's monument. Should there not be sufficient for these objects, the most excellent Madame Leonora will, I doubt not, assist Signor Ercole on my behalf."*

Tasso was received at the Court of France with the respect due to his increasing reputation. Charles IX. delighted in the society of literary men, and Tasso's conversation charmed him by its fascinating interchange of poetry and philosophy.† It is said that the monarch would have enriched him with valuable presents, but that they were modestly refused. Another report states, that Tasso, while in Paris, was so reduced, that he had to ask charity of a lady, an old acquaintance of his family. Serassi treats this tale with contempt, and asks, whether it be probable that any attendant on the splendid cardinal d'Este was likely to encounter such perplexities? The good abate seems to have forgotten, that Tasso had been

* The date on the original document is 1573, but, according to Manso, Tasso's journey took place in 1572; Serassi supposes the date to have been added by some stranger. The journey occurred in 1570. Mr. Hobhouse, who read the will, says that the last figure is illegible.

† The king is also said to have been charmed with the honour given to the valour of the French in the forthcoming "Goffredo."
—MANSO, *Vita*, c. viii.

obliged to pawn his velvet cloak for twenty-five lire. Paris was not less fitted than Ferrara to make him feel the want of money ; and though the pride of a poet's soul might teach him to reject the gold offered by a king, it might not prevent him from telling his necessities to a friendly woman. There is one incident on record, illustrative of the manner in which he employed his influence with Charles, which ought not to be forgotten. An unfortunate author had committed some treasonable offence, and was condemned to die. Numerous advocates appeared in his behalf. The king was inexorable. Still the friends of the unhappy man presented their petitions. At last, in a fit of passion, Charles swore that he would do just the contrary to what was asked him in this wretched affair. Tasso now entered his apartment, and approaching with a sad and solemn air, thus addressed him : " I come, sire, to plead the cause of justice. The culprit, now lying under sentence of death, has been guilty of making human frailty seem more powerful than the teachings of either prudence or philosophy. For such an enormity, I beg you to order immediately, not his liberation, but his execution." The king had not forgotten his hasty oath. Smiling and embracing Tasso, he instantly signed the prisoner's free pardon.

But Tasso's life was that of a courtier, and subject to all the vicissitudes created by human caprice. He had rivals and enemies in the court of his patron, and in 1571, he begged his dismissal, and repaired to Rome. A lodging was given him, by the kindness of cardinal Ippolito, in the Palazzo a Monte Giordano, in which he had spent with his father the happiest season of his youth. A letter to the duke, asking for a place in his court, was answered by a cordial assent to his wishes, and he returned to Ferrara without delay. The professorship

of geometry, to which he was soon after appointed, afforded him a small income independent of his position as a servant of the duke, and the circumstances in which he found himself now placed encouraged him to contemplate the near accomplishment of his literary designs.

The Gerusalemme had been already seen and admired, in its rough shape, by men of eminent taste and knowledge. To finish this great poem was the most serious object of his life. But there were intervals in which he could employ the exuberance of his fancy on other subjects. Hence his beautiful pastoral drama, the "*Aminta*," was produced in the spring of 1573, and performed before Alfonso and his court, to the great increase of its author's reputation. The princess Lucretia, married some time before to the Duke of Urbino, invited him to Pesaro, that she and her husband might enjoy his own recital of this exquisite composition. On his departure, she presented him with the magnificent ruby ring, which proved so useful a resource to him in after years of sorrow and destitution.

Nothing, it was hoped, would now interfere with the completion of the Gerusalemme. For a time he yielded to the temptation of writing a tragedy on the ancient Greek model. From this he was diverted by the pressing advice of Alfonso, who looked with real interest for the appearance of the great poem. Another interruption, not so easily overcome, immediately succeeded. He was seized with a severe sickness, a quartan ague, and lay for several months utterly prostrate and helpless. The disorder abated at the approach of spring; and we may easily imagine with what pleasure Tasso saw this season dawn upon him. A long winter passed on a bed of languishing; the distress attending the interruption of

all his favourite occupations ; attacks of acute pain, and the gloom which sickness and long confinement rarely fail to produce,—all these were now to be changed for renewed vigour of mind and body ; for bright suns, cheerful society, and the enjoyment of liberty and exercise. Few subjects would make a pleasanter picture than Tasso seated at his table, by the open window of his chamber, on one of the early mornings of the new spring. The blessed light of heaven and the fresh air give a transient glow to his pale countenance ; and his features, animated with the returning inspiration of noble hopes, seem to answer by their expression the happiest promises of nature.

In the month of April he wrote to his friend, the cardinal Girolamo Albano, to tell him of his recovery, and of the hoped-for conclusion of "*Goffredo*." He speaks also of the assistance about to be afforded him by certain judicious friends, who had undertaken to make a critical examination of his work, and grant him the advantage of their united counsels. But the criticisms and revisions of the judicious friends to whom he thus alludes, proved to him a source of perpetual vexation. One objected to the invocation, remarking that there is no muse in heaven. Another complained of the want of unity in the poem. A third felt conscientious scruples as to the stories of love and magic interwoven with the narrative. A fourth protested against the florid character of the style. Tasso's replies to his critics are often very ingenious and forcible ; and we know not which to regard with greater wonder, the subtleties of his metaphysical reviewers, or the keen scholarship with which he answers them in his "*Lettere Poetiche*." Whoever would rightly understand the scope of the *Gerusalemme*, or the methods which Tasso employed to render it what it is, should peruse this

valuable portion of his prose works, alike interesting to the general reader and the more curious student.

But in the midst of these literary anxieties, he had to endure others of a more painful character. He was an object of hatred to several of the dependents on Alfonso's bounty. They regarded him as their rival, and his own peculiar sensitiveness tended to provoke the insults by which they could most safely wound him. Unsettled and wretched, he made a journey to Rome, and on his return stayed some time at Florence and Sienna. In all these places he was greeted with every expression of respect, and, had he pleased, might have found in the Grand Duke of Tuscany a new and liberal patron. But a melancholy fascination drew him back to Mantua. Gratitude to Alfonso was the professed reason of his thus continuing in a place where he felt not only unhappy but unsafe. Admiration for Leonora, or an indefinable, dreamy love, too vague to seem presumptuous, but too real not to enslave, was far more probably the actual cause of his bondage to Ferrara. He sometimes made a desperate struggle to escape this thralldom. Thus he appealed to the duke to bestow upon him the office of historiographer, vacant by the death of Pigna. He preferred this request with the certainty of being refused, and of thence having an apparent reason for seeking another patron. To his confusion, the duke instantly granted him the appointment for which he asked ; and he felt himself more than ever subject to a spell fatal to his freedom and repose.

The distressing apprehensions which had begun to haunt him, day and night, could not be dissipated as the mere workings of fancy. His enemies seemed too evidently engaged in plots to ruin him. He found his cabinet broken open, and his most private papers carried away,

that means might be discovered of injuring his credit with Alfonso. The leader in this plot was Maddolò. Tasso meeting him in the court of the palace, openly rebuked him for his treachery. He replied with taunts and insulting threats. Tasso dealt him a blow in the face, and pursued his walk. Maddolò, soon after this occurrence, was defeated in an attempt to assassinate him, and fled, with his guilty associates, into Tuscany. It is suspected by some writers that the beginning of Tasso's more serious melancholy may be traced to this period. Manso supposes that he was confined to his chamber for some days, by the express order of Alfonso. Tasso himself speaks of a temporary retirement, but makes no allusion to it as a matter of constraint. He visited Modena, towards the end of the year 1576, trusting that change of scene might obliterate all trace of these painful circumstances ; but in a letter to a friend he says, "The persecutions which I suffer are of such a nature, that I experience them at Modena, or wherever I may be, as much as at Ferrara."

It was shortly after his return from this visit that the state of his mind began to create general observation. The servants who attended him were distressed by his suspicions of their honesty ; and his friends found it in vain to reason with him on the subject of his fears. A new set of apprehensions invaded him at this period. It occurred to him that he might have indulged, while an eager student of philosophy, in some heretical opinion. If so, he was subject to the Inquisition. Horrible dreams of secret trials and agonising tortures now took possession of his mind. His terror became intolerable, and he resolved to escape it by daring the worst at once. With this determination, he immediately hastened to Bologna. There he presented himself to the fathers of the Inquisi-

tion, told them his fears, professed himself ready to abide by their judgment, and awaited their decision. They pitied him, sought to appease his emotion, and finally dismissed him with a comforting assurance of his safety.

His religious fears were quieted for a time by the counsels of these merciful inquisitors, but they returned with increased force. Trembling under their terrors, he resolved to watch his thoughts, and observe a profound silence. This effort brought on a new fit of agony. His mind was filled with the notion that if he escaped the Inquisition, some servant or courtier would be employed to murder him. Alfonso and his sisters did all in their power to cure him of these gloomy imaginations, and had him frequently with them; but one evening, the 16th of June, 1577, when in the apartment of the Duchess of Urbino, he suddenly seized a knife, and aimed a stroke at the back of one of the attendants. Great was the alarm created by this occurrence. An arrest followed. Insanity, not crime, was the charitable interpretation of Tasso's conduct, and he suffered no further punishment than that of being sent, under guard, to a retired apartment of the palace. The unfortunate poet was no sooner left alone than the sense of his situation overwhelmed him with despair. His first resolution, on somewhat recovering the power of reflection, was to write to the duke, begging him to take pity on his distress. The letter was conveyed to the prince by Guido Coccopani, and Alfonso consented to his being liberated, or at least restored to his own apartment, where he directed him to be attended by the most skilful physicians, and by his own servants. Finding him growing better every day, he again took him to Belriguardo, the retirement and tranquil enjoyments of which would, he hoped, complete his cure. Tasso says, when speaking

of this period, "In the beginning of my persecutions, the duke exercised towards me the affection not of a patron, but of a father and a brother—an affection which seldom finds a place in the minds of the great."*

But no care or attention could calm his mind for any length of time. Before leaving Ferrara, Alfonso had persuaded him to set his conscience at rest in respect to religious fears, by again presenting himself before an officer of the Inquisition. This was done, and he again received the same assurances, that he was a faithful child of the Church, together with a full absolution from all the errors of which he might at any time have been guilty. The prince took equal pains to remove the doubts which he entertained respecting his estimation at court. But all proved vain. He could neither feel that his sins were absolved, nor believe that the duke really valued him. Alfonso therefore consented to his leaving Belriguardo, and taking refuge, for a time, in a Franciscan convent at Ferrara. There he spent several days in meditation and religious conversation. His thoughts still brooded in painful doubt on his early speculations. He even felt angry at the indulgence of the inquisitors at Bologna and Ferrara. They had not, he feared, dealt honestly with him; and he addressed a letter to the chief inquisitor at Rome, begging for a safer absolution. He wrote at the same time to the duke, still insisting on the cruel machinations of his persecutors. Alfonso, however, was now weary of his complaints, and forbade his writing either to him or the duchess, his sister, any more. This completed the misery of the unfortunate Tasso:—he felt more than ever assured that his destruction was fast approaching, and seizing the opportunity of being

* Discorso sopra varj accidenti della sua vita.

left alone and unwatched, he fled precipitately from the city.

Trembling every step he set, from fear of pursuers, he took his way through the most solitary roads, avoiding the towns and villages which lay on his route. Sometimes he lost himself, and having no money to obtain a guide, wandered about in terror and uncertainty. After a few days, he found himself in the district of Abruzzo, not far from Naples, and there meeting with a poor rustic, he changed his rich mantle for the clothes of the countryman, who gave him a night's lodging in his hovel, after which he pursued his way to Sorrento.

Cornelia, Tasso's only sister, had been some time a widow, but was still residing in that town. To her house the unfortunate poet bent his steps, and on arriving, found her alone with her servants, her two sons being from home. Tasso preserving his disguise, and altogether changed by grief and sickness from what he was when they parted in their youth, was wholly unknown to Cornelia, and presenting her a letter which he said he brought from her brother, she asked him some particulars respecting the distressing intelligence it conveyed. He answered her by recounting all the misfortunes to which he had been subjected, till, seeing her becoming overwhelmed with grief, he could no longer restrain himself, but gently preparing her for the disclosure, made himself known as her poor fugitive and oppressed brother.

In conformity with his wishes, she promised to keep his arrival perfectly secret, and acquainting only her sons and a near relation with the fact, represented him as a cousin, come to settle some family affairs. Her constant and affectionate care, the prescriptions of skilful physicians, the opportunity of writing in peace whatever

he pleased, and frequent walks, in company with his nephews, among the rich and picturesque scenes of the neighbourhood, rendered his mind more tranquil than it had been for some years before. But this improvement had scarcely commenced, when he resolved upon writing to his patron and the princesses, begging to be restored to favour. This application met with no reply, except from Leonora, who informed him, that she had used her influence for him in vain.* A fit of sickness followed this disappointment. On his recovery, he immediately determined, [notwithstanding the affectionate entreaties of Cornelia, to resign himself into the hands of Alfonso, and submit to his will, whatever it might be. With this intention he set out for Rome, and on his arrival there proceeded at once to the house of the prince's agent, Giulio Masetto, afterwards Bishop of Reggio.

By the advice of Scipione Gonzaga, and others of his friends, he was persuaded to rest contented with their writing to Alfonso, imploring his pardon, and asking that his clothes and writings might be sent him. But this was followed by another application, begging that he might be restored to his former situation. After some hesitation, Alfonso replied to these letters, accounting for his delay in sending the writings, by saying, that several of them were in the hands of the duchess of Urbino, who was too ill at the time to collect them, and that if Tasso would promise not to be guilty again of the same conduct, but submit himself to the direction of the physicians, he would be again received at the court of Ferrara with affection.

This answer of the duke once more filled the heart of

* "Let. al duca d' Urbino, da Madama Leonora, l' ebbe tale che compresi che non poteva favorimi."

the poet with hope ; and, availing himself of the return of the prince's ambassador, he left Rome in company with that nobleman, and reached Ferrara in good spirits, though greatly enfeebled by his late illness. Scarcely, however, had he received the first kind attentions of his patron, when his former suspicions returned with all their former force. He believed that his writings were despised, and he could not repress his indignation at finding his wish to have his manuscripts restored to him treated with apparent neglect. To complete his discomfort, both the duke and the princesses ceased at last to speak to him ; and, not able to endure this treatment, he again fled from the city, and hastened to Mantua. He had hoped, that the reigning duke, out of respect for the memory of his father, would assist him in his present distress ; but he was treated with the most discouraging coldness by all except the young prince Vincenzo, whose age prevented him from rendering any essential service.

Thus disappointed, without friends, without money, poor Tasso was obliged to sell the ruby ring which had been given him in happier days by the Princess Lucretia, and also a beautiful collar, which he wore according to the fashion of the times. The person to whom he sold them, taking advantage either of his distress or his carelessness, gave him only twenty scudi for the former, valued at seventy, and less for the latter than the gold was worth, of which it was fabricated. With the money, however, which they brought him, he proceeded to Padua, and thence to Venice, where, though noticed by few other persons, he had the good fortune to obtain the regard of Matteo Veniero, who wrote in his favour to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The letter describes him as apparently of unsound mind, but as exhibiting greater proofs of affliction than of madness. It also speaks of

his anxiety to recover his manuscripts left at Ferrara, but it is gravely added, that this is not of vital importance, the poet being well able to write better works in three years than any left behind him. No attention appears to have been given to this application, and Tasso, having nothing to detain him at Venice, determined to throw himself on the generosity of the Duke of Urbino. Nor had he reason to repent of his confidence in the noble disposition of Francesco Maria. The peace and happiness which he enjoyed at his court repaid him, he said, for all his previous wretchedness. In an answer also to a letter from his sister, he spoke cheerfully, not only of his present comfort, but of his prospects for the future, even in regard to Ferrara. The state of his mind would not allow him to enjoy this happiness long. He began to suspect that his enemies were still engaged in plotting his destruction, and that the duke, kind and generous as he was, could, in this case, render him no effectual protection. Rejecting, therefore, the counsels of his best and wisest friends, he stealthily left Urbino, and directed his steps to Turin. In the course of this journey, he came one evening to a gentleman's house, on the road between Novara and Vercelli, and, passing the night there, he was so delighted with the hospitality of his host, and the domestic comfort which appeared in the family, that he soon after wrote a dialogue entitled, "*Il Padre di Famiglia*," in which he beautifully describes the kind cavalier, and the manner in which they spent the evening.

In the morning he was accompanied by this gentleman and his sons to Vercelli, whence, having no longer the means of providing himself with a horse, he pursued his journey on foot to Turin. On arriving at the gates he was completely exhausted, and so disordered were his

looks, and so tattered his garments, from the distance he had travelled, that the guard rudely refused to admit him. Stretched on the ground, he would probably have been left to perish without food or shelter, had not Angelo Ingegneri, a Venetian scholar, to whom he was known, providentially passed at the time. Greatly affected at seeing a man so celebrated as Tasso in such a condition, he accompanied him to the palace of the Marquis of Este. There he was hospitably entertained, and assured of continued protection, both by the Marquis, and the good Archbishop of Rovere. Soon after his arrival he received a letter from his friend the Cardinal Albano, who congratulated him on his having obtained so excellent a protector as the Marquis of Este; and, at the same time, advised him in the tenderest manner to quiet himself, and follow the advice of the physicians. For some time he so far attended to this wholesome counsel as to be able to write his Dialogue on Nobility, and some pieces of poetry in praise of the Marchioness and others. In speaking of the Dialogue, which he mentioned in a letter to Cataneo, secretary to the cardinal Albano, he says, that it might serve as a specimen of what he could do, if he wrote in quiet, and with his books about him.

But his affections were still fixed on Ferrara, and he at length persuaded the cardinal to write to the duke a powerful letter in his behalf. The application proved successful. He had requested that his books, manuscripts, and clothes, might be sent him, and had further asked the gift of a hundred scudi. Not only were his wishes in these respects fulfilled, but it was intimated that if he would resolve upon undergoing a course of medicine, and be careful in his conduct for the future, he might return to Ferrara. Overjoyed at the opportunity of once more

trying his fortune at the court of his early patron, and thinking that his services as a poet would, no doubt, be required at the approaching nuptials of the duke with his second wife, Margaret Gonzaga, he again rejected the persuasions of his more prudent friends, and reached Ferrara on the 21st of February, 1579. Instead, however, of finding himself kindly received, as on a former occasion, and as he had ardently hoped would be the case now, he could obtain no audience of either the duke, the princesses, or any of the ministers; and, from the contemptuous looks of the inferior persons about the court, he saw too clearly that he no longer retained any place in his patron's esteem.

His situation was now more distressing than ever. While the nuptial festivities were filling all around him with gladness, he found himself solitary and despised, without a friend to comfort him, and with scarcely sufficient to provide for his necessities. His first arrival at Ferrara occurred amid similar rejoicings, and he was equally unnoticed in the crowd; but at that time he was cheered by all the hopes and glowing prospects of youth. Heart-broken at his disappointment, he wrote to the cardinal Albano, begging him to renew his mediation, that he might either be restored to his former condition, or at least receive his manuscripts and some trifling provision. But it was all to no purpose. His situation and the conduct of the prince continued unchanged. Indignation now got completely master of his prudence. He ceased to treat the names of his patron and the courtiers with forbearance. Pouring out a torrent of the bitterest abuse, he recalled all the praise which he had once bestowed upon them, or converted it into satire.

Alfonso was not long in discovering how Tasso was vilifying him; and it is at this period of the poet's

sorrows that the memory of his patron begins to wear the shade which has rendered it so unamiable in the eyes of posterity. Hitherto, he had left nothing undone to soothe the irritated mind of Tasso. He had taken him to his favourite villa, reasoned with him on the folly of his apprehensions, written letters for him when he was distressed respecting the pirated edition of his poem, and borne his melancholy humours, and even his violence, with the utmost patience and forbearance. But enraged at the expressions which Tasso had used against him, or really regarding them as an indisputable evidence of his insanity, he ordered him to be secured, and immediately conveyed to the hospital of St. Anna, an institution for lunatics. In whichever light he considered the conduct of the poet, this procedure was unjust and cruel. He had allowed him to return to Ferrara, and sensible as he was of the weak and irritable condition of his mind, he was bound by the common law of humanity to do nothing to increase its tendency to disorder. But his late conduct would have shaken a much sounder intellect than poor Tasso's had been for a long time past. To the injury inflicted on his fame by others, he had added the insults of a cold and haughty contempt, and he must have known, that the feelings of the offended poet would show themselves in words or actions different to those of a calm and cunning courtier. Tasso had, it is true, no claims upon the kindness of Alfonso, except those which genius has on all men, and especially on princes: those claims are sanctioned by heaven, and Alfonso sinned against the noblest feelings that inspire the human soul, by immuring Tasso in a dungeon. His thoughts were dark and bewildered, but "the light from heaven" was still in his soul, and that ought to have rendered his person as inviolable and sacred as that of a sovereign —

genius being at least as plainly the gift of God as a crown.

Tasso, it is true, had been once on the point of committing a dangerous violence ; but this had been so little thought of, that he was very soon after re-admitted into favour. With the exception of this single circumstance, his conduct had only indicated an unsettled state of mind, resulting from great irritability and disordered nerves. So well was this known to be the case, that Alfonso had, till the present period, treated him accordingly, and behaved to him as a person whose spirits had been worn out by over-exertion, and required to be soothed by repose and kind assurances. Nor was this kind treatment unsuccessful. At Belriguardo, Tasso became composed, was fast recovering, and would probably have been wholly restored to health, had he been kept there longer. The same effects were produced by the affectionate attentions of his sister, by the delight which he felt in wandering with kind and cheerful companions among the rural scenes of Sorrento, and subsequently by his residence at Urbino and Turin. Alfonso, therefore, if he really desired his recovery, was guilty of the grossest folly in sending him to St. Anna. He need but have given him the free range of his country mansion, allowed him every opportunity of completing his poem in tranquillity, and assured him of his continued friendship, by discouraging the insults and machinations of his enemies.

Whatever the cause of Tasso's confinement, which commenced some time in March 1579, he fell prostrate under its first terrors*, and remained several days insensible. As soon as consciousness returned, he wrote to his dear friend, Scipione Gonzaga. "Alas ! alas !"

* Lettere. May, 1579.

exclaims he, "I had determined to write, besides two epic poems on noble subjects, four tragedies, of which I had formed the plan, and many other excellent works in prose, so that there might be an eternal remembrance of me in the world, for I had proposed to myself the attainment of the highest glory and renown. But, oppressed with such a load of misery, I have abandoned all thoughts of glory and honour, and should be sufficiently happy if I could free myself from the thirst by which I am tormented, and if, like some poor peasant, I might pass my life in a humble cottage—if not well, which I shall never be again, at least not so grievously afflicted; if not honoured, at least not despised; possessing, if not the rights of men, at least those of brutes, which are suffered to quench freely in the streams and fountains that thirst with which, it soothes me to repeat it, I am burnt up. Neither do I fear the greatness of the evil so much as its continuance, which is horrible to my imagination, especially as in such a state I can neither write nor study. The dread of a continual imprisonment nurtures my despair, increased by the indignities offered me; by the squalidness of my beard, and hair, and garments, and the filth with which I am surrounded. Terrible above all is the solitude which I suffer here. Solitude has ever been my sworn and natural enemy. In my best days, I have run about at all hours, even the most unseasonable, to find company."

The condition of Tasso may be sufficiently understood from this distressing letter. He was treated even by the Prior and Chaplain of the hospital as a confirmed madman, and as claiming no more pity than the most hardened of their poor and miserable patients. The former of these officers of the establishment was Agostino Mosti, a man of letters, who, it might have been supposed, would have

treated him with consideration on account of the similarity of their pursuits; but the sympathy which he denied was granted by his nephew, who, inspired with the highest veneration for Tasso's genius, used every means in his power to comfort him, relieving his painful solitude by passing hour after hour in his cell, conversing on philosophy, or copying the verses and letters which the poor captive dictated for his amusement, or was too weak and nervous to write himself.*

Oppressed as he was in spirit, he summoned sufficient resolution to compose two canzoni, the one addressed to Alfonso, the other to the Princesses. In both these poems he expresses the same deep feeling of despair as in the letter quoted above, but accompanies the picture of his own misery with graceful compliments to his persecutor, calling him his first benefactor, and saying, that he complained with him and to him, but not of him. Many applications were, in the meantime, made to Alfonso on his behalf. He simply replied that Tasso was not more loved or esteemed by those who desired his liberation than by himself, and that he would suffer confinement no longer than was necessary for his cure. Another of Tasso's letters shows how terribly the prince, if sincere in these expressions, was erring in his choice of medicines. "My mind," says the sufferer, "becomes slow of thought, my fancy indolent in imagining, my senses negligent in ministering to them images of things; my hand refuses to write, and my pen even to execute its office. I seem, indeed, to be frozen, and am oppressed by stupor and giddiness in all I attempt to do." In the following sentence he adds: "Nor shall I ever be able, without some demonstration of courteous favour, to

* Serassi, lib. iii. p. 289.

revive in myself that vivacity, and those spirits not less generous, perhaps, in prose than in verse."

The courteous kindness for which he longed was afforded him by a visit from the amiable Vincenzo Gonzaga, prince of Mantua. Comforted in some degree by his attentions, and the hopes which he conceived from his influence with Alfonso, he felt his mind suddenly recover a portion of its original vigour, and he composed two of his most admired dialogues, "*Il Messaggero*" and "*Il Gonzaga, ovvero del Piacere Onesto.*"

But this faint gleam of joy was suddenly clouded by a circumstance which, situated as he was, affected him as a calamity of the worst description. The hopes connected with his great poem afforded him, even in his deepest affliction, a sort of refuge from the gloom which overshadowed everything but that. Could he ever publish it, there was reason for thinking that it would furnish him with pecuniary help, excite his friends to exert themselves more actively in his behalf, and win him that fame, the prospect of which always cheered him, till the weight of actual suffering was too great for even ambition to buoy up. Inexpressible, therefore, was his distress at learning that his poem was already in circulation, and that it had been printed at Venice without any of his own alterations or corrections. He lost no time in writing to his friend Scipione Gonzaga. Venice and its magistrates had been guilty of great injustice. They ought to have prevented this literary robbery. Even the public were injured by such a proceeding. No just idea could be formed of the poem from this surreptitious and imperfect copy. From the agitation which he thus suffered, he happily sought relief in the composition of his new dialogue "*Il Padre di Famiglia,*" and in the revision of his minor poems, which he sent in a volume to the princesses, accompanied by a

letter expressive of his continued devotion to their service, notwithstanding the machinations of designing men.

The Duchess of Urbino gratefully acknowledged this manifestation of Tasso's tried fidelity; but Leonora had been for some time suffering under a dangerous malady, and was now near her end. The news of her sickness filled the mind of the unfortunate poet with fresh sorrow. Taking advantage of his acquaintance with the celebrated Father Francesco Panigarola of Modena, then on a visit at the court, he desired him very humbly to kiss her hand in his name, and to express his distress at her illness and his anxiety for her recovery. He added, sadly, that he was too ill to write melancholy verses, but would rejoice to send her some of a cheerful character. It is not known whether this message ever reached her ear. Her death, which occurred February 10th, 1581, was lamented by most of the poets of the day, but Tasso's muse was either still incompetent to elegiac subjects, or he had private reasons for not composing any verses expressly on the event. The character of this celebrated woman was pure and dignified. Her mind was richly stored with the learning of the age, nor had it lost any of its youthful susceptibility to the beauties of poetry, when the bloom and the gaiety of youth had passed away. If Tasso loved her with the passion which has been supposed, and she shared in his feelings, there is much to admire in her conduct towards him. Without compromising the dignity of her sex and station, she appears to have uniformly treated him with the regard due to his genius and misfortunes. Even when the duke and her sister Lucretia refused to answer his letters, she took upon herself the task of counselling him, and there is reason to believe that, in all his troubles, she was his kind and constant advocate. Whatever is known of her

conduct in these respects, favours the idea that she was as amiable as she was accomplished, and that neither her high rank, the severe school in which she had been educated, nor the punctilious maxims of her brother's court, could suppress her attachment to, if not her love for Tasso. Her general conduct was the theme of universal praise, and such was the veneration for her piety, that when Ferrara was nearly destroyed by an earthquake in the year 1570, its preservation was ascribed to the efficacy of her prayers.

Tasso was not left wholly without consolation under this fresh trial of his feelings. A prisoner, and helpless himself, he saw with gratitude and admiration the labours which some few generous men of letters had undertaken in his behalf. Disgusted at the injustice of his fellow citizens, Angelo Ingegneri, a Venetian gentleman and scholar, resolved to avenge him in the only manner proper to such a case. In six nights he made a copy of the "Goffredo" with his own hand, omitting none of the author's last corrections.* Aided by his uncle the Bishop of Capo d'Istria, and Domenico Veniero, he rapidly prepared it for the press, and in the course of a few weeks brought out two editions, in different forms, the one at Casalmaggiore, the other at Parma. The experiment was eminently successful. All Europe resounded with the praises of Tasso. Malaspina, the piratical publisher of Venice, was put both to loss and shame. No one would now buy his miserable and incorrect edition. He was, therefore, obliged to reprint the work in a more correct form. To this edition he added various readings, and an essay on the two titles "Goffredo," and "Gerusalemme Liberata." The author of

* Serassi, lib. iii. p. 298.

this essay had the boldness, in speaking of Tasso's distress, to eulogise Alfonso as a pattern of princely liberality and benevolence.

These several impressions of the poem had scarcely appeared, when a young gentleman of Ferrara, Febo Bonnà, an enthusiastic admirer of Tasso, resolved upon bringing out another and still more perfect edition in that city. In this spirited undertaking he was greatly assisted by the poet Guarini, who had taken the pains to correct the Venice edition, adding to it the six cantos which were wanting to complete the poem, and several passages negligently omitted. The work appeared at Ferrara in the month of June, printed in quarto, and with a dedication to Alfonso. To this edition was also added the allegory, which had not accompanied any of those previously published. But either on account of some incorrectness, or the omission of the arguments by Orazio Ariosto, the impression met with an indifferent reception at court, and another appeared about a month after, well worthy of the talent and industry of the editor. Three months had not passed away when it was followed by one equally excellent at Parma; and thus in the course of about nine months, the *Gerusalemme* had been eight times printed in Italy, and was already so esteemed in France, that an edition had been called for, and issued from the press of that country.

But while his work was thus winning its way through Europe, and men of all countries and classes were loud in its praise, the unfortunate author was pining away in misery, suffering not merely solitude, but the worst horrors of the worst of prisons. It is terrible to hear him lament in one of his letters, that he was prevented from writing by the constant shrieks of the poor maniacs, whose cells adjoined his own; and that, sick and feeble,

he was left unnoticed to the mercy of the keepers, and the creatures of the court. He added, as another cause of complaint, and one which may well startle us, that while the publishers of his poem had gained more than three thousand ducats by its sale, they had none of them given him a single crown. Even Febo Bonnà, who had made him the fairest promises, took no heed of his necessities, but was spending the money which he had acquired through his means among the gay dames and cavaliers of Paris.

The depth of misery in which he was thus sunk urged him to reiterated exertions for relief, and he prayed the duke to remove him to another prison, or to better rooms in the hospital. His entreaties were seconded by those of Coccopani, and Laura Boiardi Tiene; and they were so far successful, that he was not only allowed more liberty, but received an intimation from the Prince of Mantua, that efforts would be made to obtain his release. His hopes were still farther raised, when the secretary of the Princess Marfisa d'Este visited his cell, and informed him that his mistress would in a few days take him with her to her country seat. Her influence with Alfonso was sufficient to obtain him this indulgence, and though he was narrowly watched all the time, and obliged at the close of the day to return to St. Anna, this brief change of scene, and the very breath of the free air, filled his heart with indescribable emotions of pleasure. He also met at the house of Marfisa, the celebrated poetess Tarquinia Molza, and Ginevra Marzia, whose conversation and flattering attentions contributed greatly to increase his satisfaction. At the same time also he received intelligence that his sister had lately married a gentleman of good family and fortune, who was well inclined towards him. These agreeable circumstances were

shortly followed by another, the gift of fifty scudi, generously sent him by Gonzaga, Lord of Guastalla. The thoughtful regard also which the poet Guarini now showed for his reputation was still more consoling:—taking the edition of the “*Rime*,” published the year before by the younger Aldus, he corrected the numerous errors which deformed it, and printed it afresh with the addition of a second part. Many learned men also began to visit with delight and awe the cell of him whose fame was so widely spread, and among others, Aldo Manucci, who gave him some books of his printing, and spent nearly the whole of the two days which he stayed at Ferrara in the Hospital of St. Anna. Manucci was followed by the celebrated painter, Francesco Terzi of Bergamo, who presented him with a copy of his magnificent work “*Immagini de’ Principi della Casa d’Austria* ;” and soon after, he received from Bernardo Giunti, a wealthy printer of Venice, a volume of his prose elegantly printed, and accompanied with a letter from Giunti, begging him to trust some other portion of his works to his hands, and assuring him that it should be printed with the utmost care. Tasso very wisely and cautiously replied, that he had been so badly used by those who had hitherto printed his works, that he must pause before he committed himself anew. He gave him, however, full permission to complete his present undertaking, and concluded by requesting that he would send him Dante’s *Treatises* “*De Vulgari Eloquentia*,” and “*De Monarchia*,” and his “*Vita Nuova*,” of which he stood much in need, saying that he would pay for them either with money, or in any way Giunti might wish. He wrote in a similar style to other printers, whom he accused in general of treating him as badly as princes and courtiers. This statement was further justified by the conduct of Vasalini, a bookseller of Fer-

rara, who, without his permission or knowledge, published a collection of his pieces, both prose and verse, which were not only incorrectly printed, but were many of them such as the poet never intended to see the light. To add to the evil, there were expressions in the dialogue entitled "Gonzaga," which would have for ever disgraced him at the court of the Medici, but for the good sense of the Grand-duke.

In a letter, written about this time, to Girolamo Mercuriale, Professor of Medicine at Padua, he describes himself as still labouring under a distressing depression of spirits, and all the other symptoms of a disordered nervous system. "I have a continual murmuring in my ears," he says, "and my imagination is incessantly disturbed with disagreeable thoughts, which prevent my studying for ten minutes together. The more I endeavour to steady my mind, the more am I distracted with various fancies and distressing feelings. My head, after eating, becomes hot and heavy; in every sound I hear there seems to be a human voice, and I often fancy that inanimate things are speaking. The night is throughout occupied with painful dreams, and my imagination then takes up again the discourse I have held with different persons on my misfortunes." He begs the physician to prescribe for him, and received for answer, that he must apply a cautery to his leg; that he must abstain from wine and beer, and use a conserve, for which a receipt would be sent him. Tasso in a letter to a friend, remarks on these directions, that he would be careful of the state of his blood, and apply a cautery to his arm; but that to apply one to his leg and abstain from wine were remedies too troublesome. He would, however, be moderate, he says, in the use of the prohibited liquors, and endeavour to follow the other directions of Signor Mercuriale: at the same time he

begs him to take care that the conserve may be pleasant to the taste, it being an excellent quality in physicians to prescribe medicine not only salutary but agreeable.

The year 1584 brought with it new hopes, and he had the satisfaction to find that, at length, the repeated intercessions of his friends, were not without their use. The duke, softened by the applications of so many persons of rank, sent for him one day, and in the presence of several of his courtiers promised shortly to set him free, permitting him in the meantime to attend divine service at various churches, to visit his friends, and be present at the public spectacles, which formed the favourite amusement of the people of Ferrara. This indulgence had the effect of restoring his mind to some degree of tranquillity and vigour, and his thoughts were sufficiently settled to allow of his composing several dialogues and minor poems.

But how often have the biographers of Tasso to speak of his delusive hopes! After a brief enjoyment of occasional freedom from his cell, he once more found himself reduced to comfortless solitude. Whether this was owing to the mere caprice or negligence of Alfonso, or to the actual condition of Tasso, it is not easy to determine; but his irritation at this cruel change in his prospects, forced from him the bitterest lamentations at his hard lot. Circumstances, however, occurred about this time, which drew off his attention for awhile from his personal sufferings.

The Gerusalemme had attracted the admiration of the most learned men in Europe, as well as that of ladies and courtiers; and among the scholars who were loudest in its praise were two gentlemen of Capua, Gio. Batista Attendolo and Camillo Pellegrino. Struck with the regularity of the plan, as well as the surpassing beauties

of the style, they contended that it excelled the "*Orlando Furioso*." Pellegrino, to enforce his arguments the better, composed a dialogue on the subject, entitled, "*Carrafa, ovvero dell' Epica Poesia*;" and, as soon as it was finished, he gave the manuscript to Marcantonio, brother of Carrafa, Prince of Stiglione. It was not long before it had been read and copied by numerous persons, whom the prince allowed to see it; and Pellegrino hearing that it was about to be printed, maimed and incorrect, resolved to publish it himself. The celebrated Scipione Ammirato, his friend, advising him to do so, the work was printed at Florence, and immediately excited considerable attention. But, though the learned admirers of Ariosto and Tasso disputed among themselves with great warmth, none appeared willing to take the field openly against Pellegrino, till, to the astonishment of the public, Lionardo Salviati, who had some time before written to our poet a letter full of eulogies, came forward to prove the inferiority of the *Gerusalemme*, not only to the *Orlando Furioso*, but to the *Orlando* of Boiardo, and the *Morgante* of Pulci. The influence and erudition of Salviati gained him attention with the Florentines, and he persuaded some literary men, who had lately founded the "*Accademia della Crusca*," to join him in the dispute. Till this period they had met with no sufficient opportunity of displaying their erudition. Salviati, by arming himself with the name of the academy, brought it into notice, and in a few years it became the most celebrated in Italy, its famous vocabulary, published in 1612, confirming the authority, it had been gradually acquiring.*

The answer which Salviati, thus supported, published to Pellegrino, was as bitter and injurious a piece of

* Tiraboschi, *Storia*, vol. vii. book i. p. 157.

criticism as the world had ever seen ; and, not content with the abuse of the Gerusalemme, the writer extended his invectives to the unfortunate poet's father. This answer, and the "Stacciata," which followed soon after, and was even still more violent, produced a great sensation ; but instead of their affecting Tasso's reputation, as had been expected, they raised a host of combatants in his favour, and the more his fame was assailed, the more it increased. Tasso himself was deeply moved by the uncalled for censure of his father ; and in his "Apologia," where he successfully argues against the objections of Salviati, he speaks with affecting earnestness of his parent's genius, and of the honour due to him as a poet. His defence was followed by another attack from the Della Cruscan, still more violent than the former ; and this again was succeeded by the reply of Pellegrino to the arguments against his Dialogue—a work so universally applauded, and so full of excellent remark, that even the academicians themselves joined in the common praise, and elected him a member of their society. Other combatants also entered the field in defence of Tasso, and the contest was kept up with vigour, till Salviati obtained a place in the Court of Ferrara ; when, though he ceased not to criticise the Gerusalemme, he changed, in some measure, the style of his language.

While this controversy was occupying the scholars of Florence and Ferrara, Tasso's thoughts were fluctuating between hope and despair. Finding the intercessions of his friends unavailing with the duke, he conceived the idea of interesting the city of Bergamo in his favour, and wrote a letter to the magistrates, begging their interference in his behalf. His application met with the most favourable attention. The magistrates of the city decreed, in full council, that Licino, who had edited the "Apologia,"

should be deputed to the duke to desire the liberation of Tasso in their name. To strengthen the cause, they sent Alfonso an ancient stone, which bore an inscription highly interesting to the Princes of Este, as serving to establish the true orthography of their name. The duke received both the messenger and the present with many marks of pleasure, and promised to fulfil the wishes of the people of Bergamo. It appears, however, that he had no immediate intention of keeping his promise. The poor prisoner remained still in close confinement at the Hospital.

The marriage of Don Cæsare d'Este with Virginia de' Medici, which was celebrated during the Carnival of 1586, brought several personages to Ferrara, in the efficacy of whose influence Tasso allowed himself to place much confidence. Don Cæsare, Virginia, and the Duchess Margaret were among the foremost to entreat for his liberation; but the prince being suddenly called to Rome, his expectations were again thwarted. It is easy to imagine what an effect these continual alternations of hope and despair must have had on the weakened frame and irritable mind of the more than ever unfortunate Tasso. Terrified at one time with the gloom of his solitude, and at another provoked by the insolence of his keepers, and the neglect with which he was treated by the duke, — now suffering all the anxiety of an ill-treated author, then agitated with sudden intelligence of fame and success, — conversing during the day with the great men, who expressed their highest veneration for the powers of his intellect, and left in the full glow of thought as soon as night began to fall, to be locked up, a maniac among maniacs, — what a fearfully mingled stream of ideas must have passed through the mind of this noble, broken-hearted being! The wonder is, not that his

reason sometimes wandered, but that it was not wholly lost.

He had been now seven years a captive, and, during the greater part of the time, had been confined in a small and unhealthy cell. Though latterly removed to a somewhat less loathsome chamber, and allowed, for a brief period, to enjoy the free air of the country, he was still treated with rigorous austerity, and the hope that solaced him one day only served to deepen the despair of the next. Thus oppressed, his mind grew more and more willing to indulge in the reveries of a disordered fancy ; his thoughts became visions ; the terror of solitude, long suffered, was changed into a belief that the air was rife with beings of another world ; all was confusion in his mind,—splendid dreams—a resentful sense of injury—a consciousness of poetic power which no other living man possessed—and a knowledge forced upon him, at the same time, that not another could be found more dependent, more afflicted, or bowed nearer to the earth,—with all these contradictory emotions in his soul, he could hardly fail to become less and less capable of distinguishing between the suggestions of imagination and the real objects of sense. Feverishly strong and active as was the former, there was nothing near him to awaken any interest, or keep alive any natural sympathy—the only principle in our being that can prevent the imagination from gaining dominion over the reason.

Tasso yielded himself, at first, a willing victim to his disordered fancy. It was an escape from the world, and the tyranny of his fellow man. But, at the period of which we are speaking, he began to believe that he was haunted night and day by a malicious spirit, whose sole occupation it was to annoy him. We are fortunately able to give his own account of this strange matter. In

a letter to his friend Cataneo, he says,—“I have received two letters from you, but one of them vanished as soon as I had read it, and I believe the goblin has stolen it, as it is the one in which he is spoken of. This is another of those wonders which I have often witnessed in this hospital. I am sure they are effected by some magician. I could prove it by many arguments, but particularly from the fact, that a loaf was visibly taken from me, for my eyes were wide open. A plate of fruit was carried off in a similar manner the other day, when the amiable young Polacco came to visit me. I have been served thus with other viands when no one has entered the prison, and with letters and books which were locked up in cases, but which I have found scattered about the floor in the morning, others being taken away and never restored.”

Nor were these his worst distresses. “Besides the miracles of the goblin, I suffer many nocturnal terrors. Sometimes I seem to see flames in the air. I am so dazzled that I tremble for my sight, sparks visibly darting from my eyes. At others I have seen amid the spars of the bed shadows of rats which could not naturally be in that place ; I have heard fearful noises, and have felt a whistling in my ears, and a jingling of bells and tolling of clocks for an hour together. Then I have thought in my sleep that I was on horseback, and ready to fall and suffer some grievous hurt. But amid so many terrors, and such great afflictions, there has been permitted me a vision of the glorious Virgin appearing with her Son in her arms, in the midst of a circle of colours and vapours : wherefore, I ought not to despair of her grace. And although it is possible that this was a mere fantasm, disturbed as I am by various delusions, and an infinite melancholy ; nevertheless, as I am able, by the grace of

God, to regulate my assent, which, according to Cicero, is the work of a wise man, I ought rather to believe that this was a miracle of the Virgin."

In writing to Eneas Tasso, he says,—“The devil, with whom I have slept and passed my time, not being able to find that peace with me which he desired, has become a regular robber, and, coming behind me when I am asleep, opens my unguarded closets. But as he has robbed me thus cunningly, I shall not trust to his not pilfering me again, and therefore I transmit to your Excellency the money given me by the Princes of Mol-fetta and Mantua, and by Signor Paulo Grillo and the Marquis of Este, making in all twenty-four scudi of gold, ten zecchini, and forty ducats di piastre. I beg you to acknowledge the receipt of this, and to use your exertions that I may escape from the hand of the devil with my books and writings, which are not more secure than my money.”

His friends, however, both at Rome and elsewhere, were still unremitting in their exertions to obtain his release. Even the Pope took an interest in his cause, and Don Cæsare d'Este wrote to inform him that he trusted his liberation was near at hand. But it was necessary that the business should be conducted with the greatest caution; Alfonso's jealous disposition was universally known*, and it was feared that, if too much haste or anxiety were evinced, he might still resist the efforts of Tasso's advocates. Don Cæsare, therefore, wisely provided himself with all the helps which could be derived from the interest and entreaties of the Pontiff, and of numerous other distinguished personages. Thus supported, he lost no time, on his return to Ferrara, in

* Serassi.

pressing the subject upon the duke's attention. This he did with so much care and earnestness, that Alfonso was at length obliged to assent. Tasso was to be liberated upon certain conditions. The foremost were, that the Duke of Mantua would take the unfortunate man under his own protection, and that he would forbid his libelling his former patron. All these kind exertions of Tasso's friends were on the point of proving useless. A violent fever brought him to the verge of the grave; but immediately on his recovery he received the joyful tidings that Alfonso had consented to his liberation. To render this the more certain, the Duke of Mantua, urged by the persuasions of the duchess, as well as by his own regard for the poet, came to Ferrara himself, and received from Alfonso's mouth the promise which had been made to Don Cæsare, and to the conditions of which he willingly subscribed. This arrangement between the two princes is stated to have taken place at the end of June 1586, and it was no sooner settled than Costantino ran to St. Anna, eager to let his unfortunate friend know how certainly he might now look for liberty. Fearing that too sudden possession of the happiness in store for him might have an injurious effect on his debilitated frame, he informed him that, in four or five days, he might expect to leave the hospital. This assurance was repeated by the Duke of Mantua himself, who visited him on the evening of the 3rd of July, and, before he left him, requested that he would write some verses for him on a subject which he named. Poor Tasso did not sleep a moment the whole night, so anxious was he to fulfil the duke's desire. The next morning he sent him his little poem, "On a Lady armed," accompanied by a letter, in which he entreats the prince to take him with him on his return to Mantua.

The long looked-for day at last arrived, and on the 5th or 6th of July, Costantino accompanied one of Alfonso's courtiers to St. Anna, with an order to the prior to set Tasso at liberty. It is not difficult to imagine the sensations of delight with which the poet must have stepped over the threshold of his prison into the free air. Seven years, two months, and some days, had been passed there, and if it be only remembered how many horrors, both from within and from without, were crowded into one of his days or nights, what an age of mental and bodily suffering shall we see comprehended in that period !

The few days which intervened between his liberation and his departure for Mantua were spent at the house of the Ambassador Albizzi, nor did he feel any desire to show himself to the good people of Ferrara, whom he had so little reason to thank for aid or sympathy. He would not even take the trouble to collect his books or papers ; so entirely did he occupy himself with the simple enjoyment of his newly acquired felicity, or so completely was he worn out with his sufferings of late, that he had become indifferent to all objects of minor importance. The only distress which he felt on leaving Ferrara arose from his not being admitted to take farewell of Alfonso.

At Mantua, Tasso was treated by the duke and his consort with every mark of esteem and respect. He was furnished with clothes of the richest description, was attended by the duke's own servants, drank the choicest and finest-flavoured wines, enjoyed the favour of the courtiers and nobles, and was as happy as human friendship and outward means could make him. But his health and spirits were not to be soon recovered from their state of deplorable exhaustion. In a letter to one of his friends, he says,—“I am still afflicted with the

grievous infirmity I brought with me to Mantua, and to which liberty alone affords any relief. The greatest of all ills is the disorder of my nerves, for I am continually disturbed with many distressing thoughts, and many imaginations, and many fantasies ; and to this is added great weakness of memory." How affectingly in the same letter does he add : "If all the blessings of existence were taken and piled up in a heap, they would not altogether be equal in value to established health."

But he now resumed his literary labours ; revised some of his dialogues ; wrote his "Lettera Politica ;" finished his father's poem of "Floridante," and his own tragedy of "Torrismondo," of which Costantino made an excellent copy, in order that it might be presented to the princess for her perusal. With all the advantages, however, which he enjoyed, he became every day more possessed by a secret feeling of discontent. Alfonso's stipulations were a restraint upon his freedom. He began to feel himself a prisoner at Mantua. The duke suspected this, and generously gave him permission to spend some months at Bergamo. There he enjoyed, for a time, the demonstrations of respect and affection shown him by all classes of the inhabitants. But he now longed to pass the remainder of his days in Rome ; and his great anxiety was to obtain permission to leave Mantua for that city. His friends endeavoured to dissuade him from this intention, but the sudden death of the duke furnished him with fresh arguments in support of his plans. Vincenzo, who succeeded to the dukedom, held him in great esteem. Tasso had just dedicated to him his tragedy of "Torrismondo," and though the prince showed him little immediate attention, he had intimated his wish to appoint him his secretary.* Tasso was more than ever

* Manso.

terrified at the prospect of such an engagement. In a letter to Cataneo, he says, that "he had no wish to undertake the service of the prince, since he was excluded from his friendship; that he knew what became the grandeur of a sovereign and the modesty of a man of letters; but that after seven years' imprisonment, nine of illness, thirty-two of exile, a thousand distresses and afflictions, and the misery of seeing his works lacerated, he would refuse, if possible, every kind of occupation, except that of correcting, enlarging, and perfecting them." He also wrote to the Abate Grillo in the same manner, and before he knew what would be the decision of the prince respecting him. "Princes," says he, "can confer reputation better than most other persons, but no reputation can please me which is separate from that gained by study and literature."

Having obtained the duke's permission to retire from his service, he resolved upon proceeding to Rome, and from thence to Naples and Sorrento. The means of performing this journey were afforded him by his private friends, the prince, greatly displeased at his departure, having refused to grant him any supplies. He set out from Mantua on the 19th of October, 1587, carrying with him only a little trunk with his clothes, and a box containing his writings and a few books. On the 25th he reached Bologna, where he remained till the 27th, when he started on a pilgrimage to Loretto. The little money, however, with which he had left Mantua, was now completely exhausted, and he was in danger of falling into the same distress as in his flight from Ferrara. Happily for him Don Ferranti Gonzaga arrived at Loretto in time to hear of his situation, and liberally supplied him with the means of continuing his journey. Numerous persons in the neighbourhood, also, on discovering that it was Tasso who had thus come, a humble and money-

less pilgrim, to the shrine, ran to offer him assistance. Having, therefore, finished his devotions, and obtained a good horse, he resumed his journey, and reached Rome on the 4th of November.

He had formed sanguine hopes that some provision would be readily granted him by the Pontiff. These hopes were speedily dissipated. His friends neglected to use their influence in his favour, and he was even threatened with some new attempt upon his liberty. Alfonso complained to the Duke of Mantua, that the conditions on which he had consented to liberate Tasso from St. Anna had not been fulfilled.

Seeing no prospect, therefore, of bettering his condition by prolonging his stay at Rome, the disappointed poet resolved to seek an asylum in Naples. He did not quite despair of obtaining the restoration of some part of his mother's dowry, or of the estate which had been confiscated on account of his father's attachment to Sanseverino. The necessary permission for his visiting Naples having been obtained from the Imperial Court, he set out for that city towards the end of March, 1588. Few days of his life were happier than those which he spent in visiting its magnificent and classic scenes. The very breathing of its pure mild air was a delight and refreshment to him, and in the monastery of Mount Olivet, where he took up his abode, he felt, as with his sister at Sorrento, that his melancholy was not incurable. Repose, the occasional society of literary friends, meditation amid scenes that were too beautiful to seem solitary, and the continual discovery of new objects to give play to fancy, or awaken a host of lofty and animating recollections,—these afforded him means for struggling with the infirmities of both mind and body, and if they did not effect a permanent cure, they relieved him for a time from suffer-

ing, and threw a gleam of light across his path, which, however transient, was incalculably precious to one who had been so long struggling with darkness.

Nor was the time which he passed at the monastery of Mount Olivet idly spent. Besides undertaking some alterations in his Gerusalemme, he wrote a poem on the origin of the religious establishment in which he enjoyed so comfortable a retreat. Having finished the first book of this poem, he sent it to his friend, the well-known Marquis della Villa, Giambatista Manso, his earliest and most affectionate biographer.

Tasso, notwithstanding all his misfortunes, had as many friends as most men; and numerous were the invitations which he now received from persons of wealth and distinction, to become their guest. But he only desired to be left at liberty to ramble undisturbed about the hills and woods in which the monastery was embosomed. Manso alone was able to overcome his resolution never to reenter the world. This amiable nobleman well understood his feelings. He won his confidence, and rendered his society agreeable to him by that unobtrusive but warm friendship, so especially acceptable to a mind like Tasso's, irritable and suspicious, yet ever yearning for sympathy. Thus he at length succeeded in persuading him to visit his estate at Bisaccio. In that most delightful of rural retreats, Tasso found that he might combine all the enjoyments of solitude with the frequent interchange of social pleasure. Manso assembled in his villa, philosophers, eminent musicians, accomplished ladies, and celebrated improvisatori. To the latter, Tasso, it is said, listened with astonishment, acknowledging that, with all his practice in making verses, he could never acquire such fluency.

But, notwithstanding the occasional success which

attended these friendly efforts to soothe and enliven him, his mind was still under the dominion of the strange delusions which had begun to affect it before he left the hospital of St. Anna. It is worthy of remark, however, that a change had taken place in the character of his supernatural visitants. While in the hospital, he was agitated day and night by the apprehension of secret enemies, and the demon which haunted him was eminently cunning and malicious. Now that he was restored to freedom, and could pass his time in meditation, and amid the grand and soothing scenes of nature, his intercourse was with a spirit of different character,—with one which seemed to meet his thoughts midway on the path to heaven, and to be sent to make his meditations more solemn and sublime.

In a letter to the Prince of Conca, written by Manso while Tasso was still at Bisaccio, the marquis says, that he and the poet often sat together before the fire, conversing on this curious subject. He had, he continues, in vain endeavoured to convince him that the supposed vision existed but in his own fancy. To all such arguments Tasso replied, that the uniform character of the visitant disproved the idea of its not being real, imagination working more capriciously and wildly. He remarked also, that the mind had not the power of reasoning distinctly while deluded by fancy, whereas he had held many and long and continued conversations with the spirit which attended him, and had heard from it things which neither he, nor any other man, had ever before heard or read, or known. "To which remark," observes Manso, "I still continued to object, till one day in the heat of our argument, he said, ' Since I cannot convince you by reason, I will undeceive you by experience, and

will make you see with your own eyes the spirit which you will not believe in from my words.' I accepted the proposal, and the following day, while we were sitting alone by the fire, he turned his face towards the window, on which he fixed his eyes, and when I spoke to him, he made no answer. At last, he said, 'See ! the friendly spirit has courteously come to speak to me; attend, and you will perceive the truth of my words.' I instantly turned my eyes in the direction to which he pointed, but though I looked intently, could perceive nothing except the rays of the sun, which entered the room through the window. While, however, I was looking, I heard Torquato commence a most sublime conversation with something or other, for though I neither saw nor heard any one but himself, his words, as he questioned, or replied, were like those used by a person in earnest debate. From what he said, I could easily comprehend the answers supposed to be received. And these reasonings were so grand and marvellous from the sublimity of the things spoken of, and from a certain something not common in discourse, that I was almost stupefied with wonder, and dare neither interrupt Tasso, nor attempt any inquiries respecting the spirit with which he had made me acquainted, but which I saw not. I, therefore, continued to listen, full of wonder and delight, and unheeded by Tasso, till, as I understood from his words, the spirit was leaving him, when he turned to me, and said, 'All doubts will now be for ever banished from your mind.' To which I answered, they are but increased; for I have heard many things worthy of marvel, but have seen nothing that you promised to show me to dissipate my incredulity. He replied, 'You have, perhaps, seen and heard much more than . . . ' but there he stopped, and

as I did not dare to trouble him with any farther questions, the conversation ended."

Manso returned to Naples in the autumn, and Tasso again took up his residence in the monastery of Mount Olivet. The correction of the *Gerusalemme* was now his almost sole employment. Whatever hope he entertained of recovering any part of his father's or mother's property had been speedily dissipated. No documents could be procured on which to found his contemplated law-suit. He felt little difficulty in bearing this disappointment. A much more trivial circumstance created him far greater annoyance. There was a young nobleman, the Count di Paleno, son of the Prince of Conca, who was resolutely bent on making the poet his guest, while his father was as resolute in opposing the idea, not enduring the thought of his keeping company with the son of the disloyal and exiled Bernardo Tasso. To put an end to the contest between the father and son, the poet generously determined to make a journey to Rome, alleging as a reason, that he was anxious about some books and writings which he had ordered to be sent to that city from Bergamo and Mantua.

He arrived at Rome, December 9th, 1588, and proceeded to the palace of the Cardinal Scipione Gonzaga, but imagining that the reception given him was not sufficiently friendly, he wrote to Niccolò degli Oddi, superior of the monastery of Santa Maria Nuova, beseeching his temporary hospitality. The good monk immediately sent a carriage for him, and nursed him with fatherly attention through a sickness of near four months' duration. On his recovery, he again visited the Cardinal Gonzaga, and found no cause to doubt the cordiality with which he was invited to remain at his palace. During this visit, he prepared for press a new edition of

his miscellaneous poems, and wrote his dialogue, "*Il Costantino, ovvero della Clemenza*." But the palace of the cardinal was no happy home for a guest badly provided with money. The domestics soon discovered Tasso's poverty, and treated his peculiarities with disdain. Suspecting the reason of the affronts passed upon him, he wrote to his friend Costantino, now in the service of the Duke of Mantua. He frankly told him his circumstances, confessed his want of a court-dress, of a coat, a night-gown, and even of shirts. Costantino faithfully fulfilled his commission. The generous duke directed that Tasso's necessities might be liberally supplied; but the order was intercepted by some wicked domestic in the service of the cardinal, and the unhappy poet left the palace in despair.

Forlorn and helpless, he would now have perished with cold and hunger, but for the timely aid sent him by the Count di Paleno, and other friends at Naples. Even with the funds thus supplied him, he was still sufficiently wretched. Passing from one inn or lodging-house to another, he felt the infirmities both of his mind and body daily increased by want of repose. Again, therefore, he applied for shelter to the friendly prior of Santa Maria, and was again welcomed by many of the benevolent monks. But even the walls of a monastery cannot shut out all enemies of peace. Some of the monks thought that their superior was over-indulgent to the capricious poet. Tasso suspected their feelings, and was miserable at the idea of living exposed to their ill-natured scrutiny. An incident followed which curiously illustrates the unforeseen results of piety and benevolence. One of the ancestors of Tasso had mainly contributed to found the *Spedale de' Bergamaschi*. Its doors were ever open to the sick and afflicted, and Tasso

felt that, for a time, he could be happier under its roof than under any other. Whether he experienced all the humiliation which some authors have connected with this circumstance, may well be doubted. It is more probable, that he knew he should be treated in the institution as the descendant of one of its founders, and would there receive both better nursing and more skilful medical treatment than could be had anywhere else in Rome.

Certain it is, that, after remaining some time in the hospital, he returned in better health and humour to his former chamber in the monastery of Santa Maria. There he soon after received an invitation from the Duke of Mantua, and a still more pressing one from the Grand-duke of Tuscany. At first, he refused both these invitations. But the grand-duke sent a special message by his ambassador at Rome, and accompanied it by the present of a hundred scudi. Tasso's gratitude would not allow him to resist such a manifestation of princely courtesy, and early in April 1590 he set out on his journey to Florence. His arrival in that city had all the appearance of a triumph. As he passed along the streets, his tall and majestic figure, his pale and thoughtful countenance, and the somewhat rapt expression of his blue lustrous eyes, inspired the by-standers with awe ; and they whispered one to another, "Never forget that you have seen Tasso."

He returned to Rome at the beginning of September. His purse had been well filled by the generosity of the duke, and the Marquis del Ventimiglia had given him a hundred scudi, the purchase-money of a place for his ancestral name in the "Gerusalemme Conquistata." These sums, however, must have been soon exhausted ; and he appears to have again complained to his friends at

Mantua of some dreaded necessity. He thus writes, as if fearing that such a statement might expose him to the charge of extravagance: "I have bought," he says, "but two melons this whole summer; and, weak as I am, have eaten meat instead of spending any money for poultry. If I have had a salad now and then, it has only been in the way of luxury. You may think that to spend money for physic is to throw it away. If so, then I confess to the waste of some few crowns. I will not allow, however, that what little I have expended in books has been lost; for I stood in great need of them, either to learn something new, or to recall what I have forgotten."

The accession of Gregory XIV. formed a new era in Tasso's hopes. He looked for some pension or secular benefice from the pontiff, which might save him from all future anxiety, and, had his friends properly urged his claims, it seems probable that they would have been granted. But he was left unnoticed, and, indignant at the neglect, he once more declared his resolution to bid adieu to the world and all its concerns. A letter from his friend Costantino set aside this stern resolve as speedily as it had been taken, and in a few days more he was on his way to Mantua. The preparation of a new edition of his miscellaneous works formed his chief employment during his stay in that city; but the printers wearied him by their delays, and a lingering sickness tended still further to mar the pleasure of his visit.

About the middle of November, he set out on his return to Rome, where he arrived, much reduced in strength, the following month. Another change in ecclesiastical affairs reawakened his dream of some sinecure benefice. That nothing in his writings might stand in the way of his preferment, he subjected them to a strict revision, and blotted out every word which

might offend the ear of a jealous churchman. While thus engaged, he received an invitation from the Count di Paleno, who by the death of his father was left free from any hindrance to the enjoyment of Tasso's company. A slight hint that the journey to Naples could not be made without money soon brought the necessary supply, and in January 1592, his young friend, now Prince of Conca, hailed him as the most honoured guest his palace could receive. The "Gerusalemme Conquistata" was nearly finished. He hoped it might be completed while the poet was his guest. This was not a vain or ungraceful wish, but it suggested to Tasso's suspicious mind that he was watched, and he became, as usual, melancholy and unsettled. He told his distress to Manso, who at once saw how vain it would be to combat his apprehensions. One day, therefore, when the prince was out, taking the poet by one hand, and his manuscript in the other, he conveyed them both to his own residence,—a proceeding which, however strange to modern notions, the Prince of Conca saw it right to excuse with great kindness and good-humour.*

At Manso's villa on the sea-coast, Tasso's health underwent a visible improvement. His spirits became more equable, and he could look at the common affairs of life under a new and more cheerful aspect. In this state of feeling, he again determined to urge his claim to the estates of his family. The present possessors repeated the legal arguments before employed, but they now added, that Tasso's madness was itself a bar to his inheriting

* Manso relates this occurrence in his own memoir of the poet, and without any apparent feeling that he had done wrong. The prince breakfasted with him and Tasso the next morning, and said that he should consider the poet, while with his friend Manso, still his own guest.—*Vita*, cap. xix.

the disputed property. "To this plea," says Manso, "it might have been answered, as in the case of Sophocles, 'can these writings be the production of a madman?'"*

On his journey back to Rome, he and his escort were stopped at Mola da Gaeta by alarming reports of a neighbouring banditti. The captain of the band was Marco di Sciarra, a name sufficiently terrible to make both commissaries, and travellers in general, thankful for the protection of walls and gates. Tasso despised the warnings of the 'good people of Mola. Drawing his sword, he proposed to run all hazards of an attack from the robbers; but neither his companions nor the commissaries would permit him to stir beyond the gates. It was impossible to tell how long this hindrance to his progress might continue, but, just as his stock of patience was exhausted, he received a message from the bandit-captain himself. Marco di Sciarra desired him to know, that he had heard of his arrival in the neighbourhood; that he honoured his name and genius, and was ready to afford him protection on his journey, and whatever might tend to render it easy and agreeable. Tasso dare not offend the authorities of Mola by accepting such an offer, but he could not refrain from declaring his pleasure at the homage paid him. Marco immediately replied, that, as he could not serve him in any better way, he would leave the road open by withdrawing his band altogether from the neighbourhood. Pachione paid no better compliment than this to Ariosto at Garfagnana.

On his arrival at Rome, Tasso had the gratification to learn that his friends had neither been idle, nor unsuccessful, in employing for him their interest with the Pope. Instead of having to seek refuge either in a monastery,

* Tasso had himself made this comparison of his case with that of Sophocles some time before.—*Let. al Cardinale Albani.*

or an hospital, he was invited to the house of the pontiff's nephews, "Not," says Serassi, "to serve, or play the courtier, — an office which he would now have refused under any circumstances whatever, — but to compose poetry and philosophise."

The names of his new patrons, if so they may be styled, were Cintio and Pietro Aldobrandini, and their natural good taste and love of study rendered them duly sensible of the advantage which they enjoyed in the company of a man like Tasso. Cintio, the elder, was unwearied in showing him marks of affection; and the poet, to prove a proportionable degree of gratitude, resolved upon inscribing to him the "*Gerusalemme Conquistata*," now on the point of being finished. Not only Cintio, but the pontiff himself, was highly delighted at the idea of the renown to be derived from the dedication of such a work; and Cintio, that nothing might occur to rob him of the honour, immediately employed Angelo Ingegneri, the Venetian, to assist in speedily preparing the poem for the press.

Tasso, in the meantime, had been provided with apartments in the Vatican, and accompanied the court when the Pope retired to his summer residence at Montecavallo. So well, in fact, was the poet contented with his situation at this period, that he expressed no wish to return to his favourite Naples. The completion of his new epic contributed still farther to increase his good-humour, and he said of this poem that he felt for it the greatest affection; that he was alienated from the former one, as a father from a rebellious child, of which he suspects the legitimacy; that this was born of his mind, as Minerva from the head of Jove; and that he would intrust it with his life, and even his soul. It was published in the latter part of 1593, and enjoyed for some time a prodigious

popularity ; but, after the first excitement of novelty had passed away, it was discovered, that its superior regularity and dignity of language were not sufficient to make up for its inferiority to the "*Gerusalemme Liberata*" in variety and splendour of invention. The comparison which the author himself drew between his two epics, both in the dedication of the "*Conquistata*," and in a treatise written expressly on the subject, is highly curious, and affords another instance of the fact, that the mind is far from being always capable of judging correctly respecting the relative merit of its own productions.

Having finished the "*Conquistata*," Tasso composed several small pieces, of a devotional kind, which were read with such avidity, that in a few days they were printed in five different cities. He also continued, though but slowly, his poem on the Creation ; and, in the early part of 1594, had completed two of the *Giornate*, and prepared the materials for the other five. His situation, in the meantime, continued as agreeable to him as at first. Cintio, who was now a cardinal, treated him with unfeigned respect, and most of the great men of Rome, whether ecclesiastics or not, sought his acquaintance. How strange was this ! Tasso had written all his noblest works, when, a very few years before, he had been suffered to wander about Rome without a friend, and to seek a few quiet days, and a little nursing in an hospital ! But he had then no prince or cardinal to protect him : — so little is genius, of the highest order, sure of respect for its own intrinsic dignity.

It is gratifying to find that Tasso, notwithstanding all he had suffered, retained the urbanity of his nature uninjured. When over-fatigued with study, or labouring under indisposition, he was accustomed to recreate him-

self by visiting different quarters of the city, and became a frequent attendant in the schools of philosophy. On these occasions, he would wait to the conclusion of the lecture, and then, collecting round him a number of the young students, spend a considerable time in conversing with, and questioning, them on various topics of interest.

But in March 1594 the decline of his constitution became alarmingly perceptible, and he obtained permission of his protectors to make a journey to Naples, hoping that the fineness of the climate might again have some influence on his health. He reached Naples on the third of June, and took up his abode in the monastery of S. Severino. Manso hastened to him the moment of his arrival, and their meeting was attended with every demonstration of the most ardent and unchanging friendship. The genuine kindness of the marquis was evinced in a singular but affectionate manner. One of the first inquiries which he made of Tasso respected the state of his wardrobe in regard to linen, and, finding that his supply was small, he immediately set his mother and wife, with their domestics, to work, and, in a few days, sent the poet a large stock of everything necessary for his use.

Though his health was not materially improved, Tasso was so far relieved by the repose and change of air consequent on his journey, that he was able to enjoy the society of his friends, and of the various literary men who came to see him at the monastery, or invited him to their houses. But four months being already passed, the Cardinal Cintio grew impatient of his absence, and wrote to request his immediate return. Tasso replied, that his lawsuit was still but in an early stage of its progress, and that he was, moreover, engaged in printing his "Discourse on Heroic Poetry," and the "Dialogo

delle Imprese." Cintio, not content with this apology, and desirous of conferring upon his friend the highest honour in his power to bestow, proposed to the Pope and his brother cardinals to award him a public triumph and coronation. His suggestion was immediately adopted, and he wrote to the poet again, summoning him to return without delay, and informing him of the honour that awaited him.

Tasso, it is said, expressed neither pleasure nor surprise at this flattering intelligence. It would have been surprising if he had. He was too well assured of the universality and stability of his fame to desire such an exhibition; and he had too much taste not to shrink from becoming the object of a vulgar show. He, however, informed the cardinal that he would return to Rome by November. The promise was fulfilled, and on arriving near the city, he was met by a great number of the Pope's servants and several courtiers, who conducted him with great ceremony to the palace. On the following morning he had an audience of the Pope, who spoke to him respecting his triumph and coronation. The young cardinal wished it to take place immediately, but afterwards considered that it might be better to defer the ceremony till the fine days of spring. Tasso, however, listened to all that was said unmoved, answering his friends who congratulated him, in the words of Seneca, "*Magnifica verba mors prope admota excutit*"—Approaching death despises proud designs. His health, indeed, grew every day worse, and he was wholly occupied with the thought of finishing his sacred poem of "*Genesis*." In this labour he was greatly assisted by Ingneri, who both revised what was already written, and eagerly copied what Tasso dictated from time to time, or wrote on different slips of paper.

It is cheering and consolatory to find, that every step which Tasso set towards the goal of his weary journey, his path became less thorny and rugged. At the beginning of 1595, the Pope conferred upon him an annual pension of two hundred scudi ; and he had the satisfaction to hear, about the same time, that his opponent in the suits instituted at Naples, had agreed to a compromise, and offered to settle on him an annuity of two hundred ducats. But in the month of April, and when his friends were preparing for his coronation, his spirits suddenly drooped, and he anticipated the speedy approach of death. In order that he might pass the last hours of his life in quiet and devotion, he requested permission to retire to the convent of Saint Onofrio, to which desire the cardinal gave a melancholy assent, and had his carriage prepared to convey him to the monastery without delay. The morning on which he left the palace was dark and stormy, a heavy rain falling incessantly, accompanied with violent blasts of wind. It was with no little surprise, therefore, that the monks watched the approach of the cardinal's carriage. They went out to meet the unexpected visitor. Tasso descended the vehicle with difficulty, and, answering the salute of the prior and the brethren, said he was come to die among them. On the 10th of the month his disorder, increased, it is said, by his having taken some milk, of which he had always been fond, left no longer any hope of his recovery. He was seized with a fever, which arrived at its height on the seventh day, and Rinaldini, the Pope's physician, warned him that his last hour was at hand. Prepared for this intelligence, Tasso embraced him, thanked him with cheerfulness for his warning, and then, raising his eyes towards heaven, fervently praised God for having, after a long and tempestuous voyage,

carried him into port. "From this hour," says Manso, "he spoke no more of earthly things, nor of fame after death, but, wholly intent on celestial glory, thought of nothing but how he might best prepare himself for that great and sublime flight which he hoped to take. Hence he began to elevate his thoughts, supporting himself, as it were, on two most swift and powerful wings, one of which was distrust in himself, the other trust in God."

Notwithstanding his extreme weakness, he resolved upon taking the sacrament the following morning in the chapel belonging to the monastery, and surrounded by the brethren. Supported in the arms of his attendants, he went through the sacred rite with the devotion to be expected from a dying man, and such a man as Tasso. When he was replaced in his bed, the prior put some questions to him respecting his will, and where he wished to be buried; to which he made answer, that he had so little property, that it was scarcely worth considering what became of it after his death; but turning to his confessor, he said smilingly, "Father, write down that I render back my soul to God who gave it, and my body to the earth, whence it is derived, in this church of Saint Onofrio; that I make Cardinal Cintio the heir to my goods, and request that he will restore to Signor Giambatista Manso that little picture of me, which he has been unwilling to give away except in the present case; and that to this monastery I give this image of my most beloved Redeemer," saying which, he took from the head of the bed, a crucifix which had been given him by Clement VII., and was not only of singularly beautiful workmanship, but had been specially blessed by the pontiff.

He continued to linger on from this time to the 24th day of the month, and the fourteenth from that of his attack,

employing all that period in devotion, and in conversing with his confessor, who is reported to have said, that he could find no taint of mortal sin in his life for many years previous to his decease. On the day above mentioned, he was every moment expected to breathe his last, and Cintio being informed of his condition, anxiously hastened to the monastery, carrying with him the benediction and absolution of the pontiff, which he had solicited for his friend. Tasso received this mark of kindness with devout gratitude, saying, as the absolution was given him, that "it was the car on which he hoped to go crowned not with laurel, as a poet into the capitol, but with glory as a saint into heaven." On the cardinal's inquiring if he had no request to make respecting anything to be done after his death, he replied, that he should be happy if all the copies of his works could be collected and given to the flames, since God had not permitted him to finish the "*Sette Giornate*," and the "*Gerusalemme*" was especially imperfect. "He knew," he said, "that it would be difficult to gather together all the copies dispersed about, but it would not, he believed, be impossible." The cardinal, seeing the earnestness with which he made this request, answered him, that his wish would not be forgotten. Tasso expressed no little pleasure at receiving this intimation, and continued to observe, that as he had now obtained, through the visit of the cardinal and the benediction of the pontiff, all he could desire in this world, he begged to be allowed to spend the short space which remained in meditation, and to be left till the following morning entirely by himself with Christ, who, he observed, taking the crucifix in his hand, could alone mediate for him between his heavy sins and infinite mercy. This request was immediately complied with, and the cardinal and other visitors, leaving the chamber,

gave way to their grief in copious floods of tears. Tasso remained alone with God, as he desired, and the only persons thenceforth permitted to enter the chamber were his confessor, and one or two of the fathers, distinguished for their learning and sanctity. As these holy men watched round his bed, they comforted him by the singing of psalms, in which he occasionally joined, and then, retiring into himself again, held silent communion with his Saviour. In this manner was passed the whole of that solemn night. The next morning, about eleven o'clock, knowing that his hour was come, he embraced the crucifix, and with the words on his lips "Into thy hands, O Lord," he resigned his spirit to God.

This event occurred on the 5th of April, and in the evening of the same day the corpse, all that remained among men of the divine poet, was privately interred in the church of the monastery, and covered with a plain marble slab. Manso, on visiting Rome ten years after, was anxious to erect a monument to his memory, but the Cardinal Cintio prevented his proceedings, observing that he intended to erect one at his own expense. It was even with some difficulty that he obtained permission to inscribe the poet's name on the marble tablet, in order that it might be known by strangers, who visited the monastery, in what spot his bones were deposited.* The cardinal never fulfilled his design, and all Tasso's sepulchral honours were comprehended in the simple inscription of his friend, till Cardinal Bevilacqua placed his remains in a prouder receptacle, and framed a loftier sounding though not so noble an epitaph as the plain "Hic Jacet Torquatus Tassus."

* Vita, cap. 191.

CHIABRERA, TASSONI, ETC.

WITH the life of Tasso closed the most splendid, and, perhaps, the last splendid era of Italian poetry. The period was approaching when the wounded spirit of her muse would exclaim, "Italia, Italia! why wert thou not more powerful, or less beautiful?"

It would be a useless and uninteresting task to name the host of indifferent writers who lived in the seventeenth century, and are termed among their countrymen, by way of contempt, "I Seicentisti." The first of the small number excepted from this severe censure is GABRIELLO CHIABRERA, who was born at Savona, June 8, 1552, and fifteen days after the death of his father.* His mother did not remain long a widow, and Gabriello was adopted by his father's brother and sister, neither of whom was married. At the age of nine his uncle took him to Rome, where he resided, and provided him with a private tutor, from whom he learned Latin. But his studies were interrupted by two violent fevers, one of which attacked him on his arrival in Rome, and the other about two years afterwards, keeping him for seven months in the utmost peril of death. On his recovery, his uncle sent him to the Jesuits' College, in order, he said, that by sharing in the exercises of boys of his own age, he might strengthen his delicate constitution at the same time that he pursued the study of philosophy. He continued at the college till he was twenty, when he paid a short visit to his mother at Savona, and on his return to Rome attached himself to the court of the Cardinal Cornaro Camerlingo. Several years were

* Vita da Stesso, Opere, vol. i.

passed by him in this service, when, having killed some gentleman in a duel, he was obliged to seek safety by flight. He tells us that he did not complain much of his exile from Rome. Competency and literature made him sufficiently happy, till in another broil, which, according to his own assertion, was owing to no fault of his, he received a slight wound, for which, he says, "his own hand took revenge." The result was a long and deserved imprisonment. At the same time that he was suffering in this manner from the indulgence of his impetuous disposition, he saw himself in danger of seeing his property confiscated, which would certainly have taken place but for the interference of Cardinal Cintio Aldobrandini, the friend of Tasso, who obtained its restoration. This enabled him to pass the rest of his life in quiet and independence, and at the age of fifty he married Lelia Pavese, the daughter of Giulio Pavese and Marzia Spinola. His health, he informs his readers, was more than commonly good, and, except during the illnesses above mentioned, he had never kept his bed: "And this," says he, at the end of his brief autobiography, "is all there is to tell of Gabriello as a common citizen, and this is little worth knowing."

As a writer, however, he thinks more particular information may be required respecting him. He therefore informs us, that he was intimate with Mureto, and the bosom friend of Sperone Speroni; that on leaving Rome, and returning to Savona, he began to study poetry systematically, as an art, and laboured, with unceasing diligence, to make himself master of its noblest models. It was his common observation, that the poets of Italy were far too timid both in style and invention, and that, instead of being like them, he would follow the example of his countryman Columbus, discover a new world, or

perish. With this feeling, he strove to imitate the boldness and freedom of Pindar, and was sufficiently successful to become one of the most admired writers of his age. The Grand-duke of Tuscany, the Dukes of Savoy and Modena, invited him to their courts, and never allowed him to depart without an accumulation of honours and presents. Equal regard was shown him by the Pope, and a respect, even still more flattering, by his fellow-citizens. When Savona, on the occasion of a war, was filled with soldiers, the house of the poet Chiabrera was expressly exempted, by a decree of council, from military occupation.

These fruits of his genius and study were amply sufficient to put him in good-humour both with his art and with the world. Of the former, he always spoke with generous enthusiasm; and to let it be known that he valued the fame gained by its means above honours of any other kind, he adopted as his motto, encircled by a laurel, this line from Petrarch: —

“Non ho, se non quest’ ana.”

Chiabrera lived to the age of eighty-six or eighty-seven, and, notwithstanding his turbulent character in youth, had long been as good a Catholic as poet. “Santa Lucia,” he said, “has been my aid for sixty years; and during that time I have never failed to commend myself to her twice a day.”*

Contemporary with Chiabrera was ALESSANDRO TASSONI, a writer of genius, and not likely to be forgotten

* In the latter years of his life he wrote some devotional works, and the inscription which he left to be engraved on his tomb is equally humble and pious: —

Amico,

“Io vivendo cercava il conforto per lo Monte Parnasso;
Tu, meglio consigliato, fa di cercarlo sul Monte Calvario.

while there are readers capable of understanding the nice characteristics of Italian humour. He was born at Modena, in the year 1565, and lost both his parents almost before he left his cradle. The relations on whom he became dependent regarded him with little affection, and his early days were saddened by most of the sorrows which fall to the lot of a neglected orphan. But he bore vexation and discouragement with a patient and resolute spirit. Triumphant over all difficulties, he gained an early reputation for sound scholarship, and in the year 1597 became secretary to the Cardinal Ascanio Colonna.* In this capacity he accompanied his patron to Spain, and appears to have acquired, in a few years, sufficient fortune to live in comfort and independence. The "Accademia degli Umoresti" at Rome, elected him its president; and though he afterwards became attached, successively, to the courts of Savoy and Modena, this seems to have been rather from taste than actual necessity. He died at Modena in April 1635.

The "Secchia Rapita," or "Rape of the Bucket," Tassoni's only well-known work, was written to celebrate the following important event. In the petty wars between Bologna and Modena, a party of volunteers, belonging to the latter city, had the hardihood to enter Bologna, march up to a well in the market-place, seize the bucket, and carry it off in triumph. The trophy thus won was carefully locked up in the belfry of the cathedral at Modena, a monument of eternal renown to the Modenese, and of discomfiture to their rivals. Tassoni's idea of writing an epic poem, in twelve books, on such a theme, is itself a laughable preliminary to the various details which he has, with comical gravity, inter-

* Vita, Compil. da Robust. Gerone.

woven in his narrative. A modern and foreign reader may miss much which is excellent in the humour of this celebrated poem, but even with many deductions enough will remain to excite very genuine mirth.*

GIAMBATTISTA MARINI was born at Naples in October 1569. His father had acquired wealth and station as a lawyer, and he hoped to see his son succeed him in the same prosperous career. But Giambattista early exhibited proofs of a fanciful, desultory mind. The little time which he employed in study was devoted to the poets. He began to write verses himself; and, prompted by a fatal vanity, shamed his prudent father by printing his rhymes, not very creditable either for taste or sentiment. This was not to be endured. In a fit of sudden passion, his father expelled him the house; and he was reduced to a state of beggary, when the generous Marquis of Villa, Tasso's patron, the Prince of Conca, and one or two other noblemen, pitied his distress, and afforded him a temporary asylum. Involved, by seconding some friend, in a dangerous quarrel, he was thrown into prison, and after his release was thankful to be received into the service of the great and wealthy Cardinal Cintio, whom he accompanied on several visits to the principal courts of Italy. It was on one of these occasions that the Duke of Savoy created him a cavalier, and that he was exposed, in consequence, to the hatred of Murtola, the duke's secretary, and narrowly escaped assassination. In 1615 he was invited by Queen Margaret to France, and, at her death, enjoyed the still more distinguished patronage of Mary de' Medici. The "Adonis,"

* Such was the popularity which it gained while still in manuscript, that a person who made copies of it, and sold them at eight scudi a piece, gained about two hundred ducats before it was printed.—*Gerone*.

his principal work, was published in 1623, when he left Paris and returned to Italy. At Rome he was welcomed by the literary men of all classes, was elected president of the "Accademia degli Umoristi," and had the prospect of uninterrupted prosperity, when the death of Gregory XV. changed the aspect of affairs, and he retired to Naples. Urban VIII. was as willing as his predecessor to show honour to so popular a poet, and Marini was on the point of returning to Rome, when he was assailed by a sudden sickness, and died in March 1625.

Marini was a man of genius. His poems have many beauties; but their original popularity may be ascribed rather to their meretricious imagery, than to any intrinsic excellence of language or design. With the revival of a healthier taste, and sounder moral sentiments, than those which prevailed in his own and a subsequent generation, Marini's voluptuousness ceased to be either attractive, or tolerated.*

The less known but ingenious BRACCIOLINI was contemporary with these writers. He was born at Pistoia in 1566, where he died after a long career, rendered prosperous by ecclesiastical patronage, in 1645. He is briefly described by one of his biographers as "a gentleman, a canon, a lawyer, and a poet."† His chief work, "Lo Scherno degli Dei," contested for some time the palm of comic merit with Tassoni's "Secchia Rapita," and claimed the praise of being the first poem of the kind. Like some other authors, Bracciolini, though indebted to literature for his success in life, did not wish

* Tiraboschi cannot resist an expression of surprise that Marini should have enjoyed the patronage of churchmen.—*Storia*, t. viii. lib. iii. p. 456.

† Mazzuchelli.

it to be supposed that poetry was to him either a toil or a profession. Hence he tells us that, while Dante grew pale and thin with the long labour of his verse, he only idled with the muse, and enjoyed his ease : —

“Ma io, che al fuoco i versi miei consacro,
Fo pensier di passarmene in lettica
Al Pegaseo con negligente passo,
Però senza studiar compongo e ingrasso.”

But when I write, my verse I consecrate
Unto the fire; and stretched upon a mat
There mount my ambling Pegasus elate,
Compose at ease, unstudying, and grow fat.

METASTASIO.

PIETRO METASTASIO, or Trapassi, was born at Rome, January 13th, 1698. His parents, Felice Trapassi d'Assisi, and Francesca Galasti da Bologna, were poor but respectable. Felice had been obliged, by the misfortunes of his family, to serve, for some years, as a private soldier. But he was frugal and industrious, and, on obtaining his discharge, he united his small savings with those of a friend, and, settling in Rome, opened a booth for the sale of oil, meal, and other articles of ordinary consumption. Early and late, he might be seen attending to the concerns of his little shop. Francesca united her efforts with his. They were happy in their humble prosperity; and whatever gain rewarded their industry was lovingly spent in indulging and educating their children.* Pietro afforded the earliest promise of rewarding their affectionate solicitude. When ten years old, he improvised verses on whatever attracted his notice. A voice singularly musical added to the charm of these effusions, and his parents listened to them with as much delight as wonder. He had just returned one evening

* Francesco Reina. Abate Cordara, Lettere.

from school, and was standing at the door of his father's booth, amusing himself, as usual, with his unpremeditated rhymes, when the great lawyer, Abate Gravina, with his friend Lorenzini, happened to pass by. The sweet tones of Pietro's voice, his pleasant look, and the marvellous facility with which he poured out verse after verse, so charmed Gravina, that he waited till the improvised song was finished, and then offered the young minstrel some silver in proof of his admiration. The money was refused with a slight sign of displeasure, and Gravina, still more interested by this show of independence, entered the shop, and had a long conversation with Pietro's parents. Gravina was well known as a man equally eminent for worth and learning. His praise of their child filled the good shopkeeper and his wife with delight. But it ended in a proposal as distressing to their affectionate hearts as it was flattering to their hopes. Gravina, childless, and without relatives, proposed to take Pietro and adopt him as his son. Having made this offer, he left them, desiring their decision the following morning.

It is not difficult to imagine, what a long dialogue immediately ensued between the anxious father and mother, — what a perplexing mixture of doubts and hopes kept them awake through the night. Pietro was their joy and pride. The house without him would seem changed from what he had made it, through all the ten years of his happy childhood. But prudence prevailed over every other consideration. It was determined that the kind lawyer's offer should be accepted. Early in the morning, therefore, Francesca was up, and having dressed Pietro in his best attire, conducted him, with many ill-suppressed sobs and tears, to the abate's residence.

Gravina felt, from the first, the tenderest affection for

his new charge. It was seen in his looks, and the adieus between mother and child were not pronounced, before both had been made happy by his fatherly tenderness and promises. Those promises were amply fulfilled. Having obeyed the fashion of the times, and his own learned tastes, by translating the Italian name of his adopted son into Greek, he commenced his education in the hope of making him a sound scholar and able lawyer, trusting that genius would do enough for him as a poet. Pietro studied hard to fulfil the wishes of his patron, and the longer they continued together, the greater became their mutual affection. The one, to please and encourage his youthful pupil, suppressed the prejudices, and softened the stern notions acquired in a long life of study; the other, to prove his love and gratitude, kept the impulses of his genius entirely subject to the wishes of his venerable friend. Thus, in accordance with his views and instructions, the first attempts which he made in dramatic composition were strictly confined to imitations of Sophocles or Euripides. Whenever he indulged in a full, free outpouring of spontaneous thought, it was to delight Gravina himself, who loved hospitality, and rejoiced in surprising his numerous guests by displaying the talent of his adopted son.

The plan of Pietro's life had been carefully drawn by the good abate, in exact imitation of his own. Thus having procured his admission to the early orders of the Church, he took him to Crotona to study philosophy, and he did his best to imbue him with a profound respect for all branches of the law. Pietro was equally happy and obedient, and many years were thus passed in the pursuits which promised future eminence, with no sacrifice of present liberty, or enjoyment, which could not be easily endured.

Gravina's death was a far greater loss to his adopted son than his fortune was a gain. No length of years lessened the affection which he entertained for his memory. But when the first sorrow had subsided, the young heir to his property began to imitate his hospitality, unmindful of the prudence and wisdom which had carefully avoided excess. It was not long before the fruits of the abate's industry were visibly diminished. Pietro took the warning given him by his shrinking finances. He applied for a place under the Pontifical government. Some of his most frequent guests had interest at court. He asked their help, but none was afforded him, and the coveted office passed into other hands.

This was his first lesson in the ways of the world. He had imagined that his genius, his friendly spirit, his ready sympathy with all around him, must necessarily recommend him in an appeal for ecclesiastical patronage. The discovery that this was an error proved more useful to him than it has in many other cases. He resolved to seek no favour from churchmen, till he could bring some prince or nobleman to flatter or reward them on his behalf. Gathering, therefore, together the remains of his property, he removed to Naples, and there placed himself, as a student, under the instructions of Castagnola, an old practitioner in the law, but as remarkable for surliness of temper as for eminence in his profession. Metastasio having, at their first interview, let some expression of his love of poetry escape him, was long looked upon by Castagnola with an angry feeling of suspicion. But this, as all other adverse sentiments, yielded at last to the influence of Metastasio's unvarying sweetness of disposition. The lawyer's inveterate bad humours were rendered mild by his pupil's patient good

sense and pleasant conversation. He even began to think that the time would come when some cause might be trusted to his care, and when the pernicious tastes of his early years would be wholly forgotten.

Castagnola knew little how carefully Metastasio had combined literary with professional study, still less, how well acquainted many persons in Naples were with his ability as a poet. An event occurred which soon betrayed the secret. It was the custom at Naples to celebrate the birth-days of the Austrian royal family with great public rejoicings. That of the empress was near at hand, and the viceroy had reasons for wishing to observe it with more than usual pomp. But a festival, in that age, would have been ridiculed and despised, if not introduced by a drama written especially for the occasion. Unluckily for the viceroy, though Naples abounded in actors, dancers, and musicians, it had no playwright, either professional or amateur. Great was the viceroy's vexation at this unexpected hindrance to his plans. A very inferior dramatist would have been accepted in such a dilemma ; but whatever might be the promptings of vanity in some poetical minds, the thought of a failure, at such a time, instantly suppressed them. Sonnets, or canzoni, perhaps, might have been attempted, but no drama in any form.

At length it was whispered among the courtiers, that the old lawyer Castagnola had a pupil, who had been known at Rome for extraordinary poetical powers, and facility of composition. Some of those who made this report had seen and talked with the young student. They could even repeat portions of his poems. The viceroy desired him to be sent for. But here another difficulty occurred. Metastasio had assured his few intimate acquaintances, that he had come to Naples to

perfect himself as a lawyer, and that nothing should induce him to forfeit the friendship of Castagnola. In any other case, the good-natured viceroy might have respected these sentiments, but he was too anxious about the festival to care for any interests with which it was not connected. Metastasio, therefore, was sent for, and compelled to listen to the demand upon his talent. Humbly and seriously did he protest his inexperience in dramatic composition. This plea was easily answered; he must do his best. Then came another protest. To be known as a poet and a writer of plays, must inevitably ruin his professional prospects, — prospects which he was now unaffectedly and earnestly resolved to realise. The viceroy could not at once answer this statement, made with equal good sense and modesty. He acknowledged its force, but still claimed the contribution to the general festivity, which he alone seemed able to render. Metastasio saw there was no escape. All he could do was to require of the viceroy, that, if he furnished the drama, no mention whatever should be made of his name. This was promised, and he left the palace, protesting that he had fallen a martyr to loyalty.

Though writing at the command of the greatest man in the kingdom, the terrified poet dare only attend to the composition of his drama after retiring to his room at night, or while Castagnola was too busily engaged with a client to watch his movements. But his fertile genius overcame every obstacle to success. The "*Orti Esperidi*" was completed in ample time for the festival. Metastasio placed it in the hands of the viceroy, who read it with anxious attention. It surpassed his expectations; and charmed with its unusual beauty, he immediately presented the author with a purse of two hundred ducats.

At length came the day for the performance of this

celebrated drama. The most skilful composer in Naples had furnished the musical accompaniments, and an artist of equal eminence had been employed in providing the decorations. Vast crowds were as usual attracted to the theatre ; but it was the magnificence of the scenery, or the excellence of the music only, which had been the subject of popular report. When, therefore, it was discovered, that the play itself had been conceived in the purest spirit of poetry, and was founded on a plot admirably developed, the surprise and delight of the audience were unbounded. All ears, all hearts, were eager to catch every word that fell, "and woe," says an old writer, "to him, who chanced to make any noise ; for the people, anxious not to lose even half a line, punished the offender with such a volley of abuse, that he was glad to effect his escape." Nor was it merely during the representation that public approbation was thus strongly manifested. Nothing was talked of but the new drama. Its brilliant success brought both profit and honour to all connected with the theatre, and among the foremost to express their gratitude to the unknown author, were the printer, the scene-painter, the musicians, the actors, and, above all, the far-famed cantatrice, Marianna Bulgarelli.

The greater the applause bestowed upon the "Orti Esperidi," the greater was the curiosity about the name of the writer. Nothing could be learnt from the viceroy. He honourably kept his promise ; and when suspicious whispers reached the ears of Metastasio himself, he either observed a profound silence, or repelled the imputation as injurious and absurd.

Inquiry was thus completely at a fault ; and would probably have ceased, but for the keenness and perseverance of the cantatrice herself. She compared circum-

stances unnoticed by others ; put questions to one person or another in the viceroy's household, and obtained answers which gradually led her to the truth. La Bulgarelli having thus discovered the secret, lost no time in telling it to the world.

Few authors could have so mastered literary vanity as not to claim, at once, the splendid reputation offered Metastasio. But he had learnt much from his early experience at Rome. He remembered many of the lessons of his venerable friend Gravina ; and it was his anxious and serious purpose to become a lawyer, and prepare the way for success by establishing himself in the good opinion of Castagnola.

The discovery that he was the author of the play, now so famous, destroyed all his sober plans and calculations. Castagnola treated him with unbearable contempt. It is not surprising, therefore, that he every day became more willing to listen to the soft flatteries of the accomplished singer, and less steady in his resolution never to forsake jurisprudence for poetry. La Bulgarelli saw the advantage which she had gained. To his arguments in support of his professional plans and hopes, she opposed the splendid prospects of successful genius. When he hinted at his constitutional dread of poverty, his abhorrence of a life of adventure compared with one of quiet respectability, she assured him that, with his talents, he might depend upon immediate and constant patronage.

But he felt it a duty, before finally yielding to these representations, to seek an interview with Castagnola. He prepared himself for the occasion. It was his wish to justify the intended change in his studies ; and he had many ingenious, apologetic arguments to defend his course. The meeting took place. He began his statement ; but scarcely had he uttered a sentence, when the

old lawyer abruptly turned his back upon him, and left the room without uttering a syllable.

This decided Metastasio's fate. In the house of Marianna Bulgarelli, he found ample leisure to cultivate his art, and, as far as that was concerned, able and judicious advisers. A professional engagement led him and Marianna to Rome, where they took up their residence with his father and mother. Marianna, soon after this, left the stage, and passed the rest of her days in domestic retirement. Metastasio, in the mean while, composed his "Catone," "Ezio," and "Semiramide;" followed rapidly by the "Alessandro," "Artaserse," and "La Contessa de' Numi." The fame which he acquired by these productions extended throughout Europe, and in the year 1729, he received a letter from Prince Pius of Savoy, calling him, in the name of the emperor, to the court of Vienna, as successor to Apostolo Zeno.

It was not without many sorrowful feelings that Metastasio prepared to leave his home, and the quiet and affectionate society of those whose love was dearer to him than any measure of popular applause. But he could not resist the temptation of a place at court, the title of laureat to an empéror, and a yearly stipend of 4000 florins. His reception at Vienna greatly assisted in relieving the pain felt on his first leaving home. The emperor admitted him to an audience, spoke of his genius, and assured him of his continued patronage.

Metastasio appears to have encountered but one obstacle to his success at this period of his brilliant career. It is thus described in a letter to Marianna, dated July 4th, 1733:—"Will you suggest a subject for my new opera? Yes or no? I am in an abyss of doubt. Do not laugh at me, and say that the evil is in the bones. The selection of a subject well merits this agitation. I

must determine at once. There is no avoiding the necessity. Were this possible, I should go on doubting till the day of judgment, and be in doubt still. Read the third scene in the third act of my 'Adriano.' Observe the character of the emperor described by himself, and you will see mine. Thus you may also learn, that I know my faults, though I cannot correct them. This pertinacious indulgence in a vice which torments me, and can do no possible good to any one, often leads me to reflect on the tyranny which the body exercises over the mind. Why cannot I escape? Why cannot I fulfil the resolution so often taken? It is because the mechanical constitution of this earthly, this imperfect habitation, makes the mind conceive of things with the colours which they take before reaching it, as the rays of the sun appear to our eyes now yellow, now green, now red, according to the colour of the glass, or web, through which they pass to where we happen to be. Do not be annoyed at my thus acting the philosopher with you. There is no one else with whom I can so speak, and it is only by these letters that I can recall the happy hours we once passed together in discourse of this kind. Oh, how much matter have I since collected for it from experience in the world! We will again talk together some day, if no unlucky freak of fortune ruffle the threads of my present honourable but fatiguing life. Take care of yourself in the mean time."

We find him, two years after, writing somewhat pettishly to his brother on the same matter. "If," he says, "to furnish subjects, it were only necessary to make an index of Roman heroes, you would have done for me what you ought. But we want something more than mere catalogues. What have you done by mentioning Sylla, Cæsar, Pompey? Many thanks for the gift.

I know them as well as you do, and so does every one that can read. No, you must say to me, 'See the life of Sylla ! there is such and such an action, which I think would be fit for representation, because it interests on this or that account, because it affords room for episodes, because it creates surprise.' There is Sylla, you say. Heavens ! would you have me write his life ? There would be no want of another."

Notwithstanding all these difficulties and perplexities, Metastasio continued to write, to the admiration of the court and the people of Vienna. Rewards were bestowed upon him with increasing liberality, and, in addition to his usual pension, the emperor gave him the sinecure office of treasurer to the province of Cosenza, producing a yearly income of 350 zechins. The death of Marianna, which occurred about this time, affected him with profound sorrow. She left him all her property ; but, to his credit, he restored it entire to her several relations. The "*Betulia Liberata*" is said to have derived its melancholy and impressive beauty from his wish to preserve her memory. It was followed by the "*Clemenza di Tito*," another of his most admired compositions. "Many of the scenes in this drama," says Voltaire, "would have been a credit to Corneille, when he did not declaim, and to Racine, when he was not weak." The "*Achille in Sciro*" appeared on occasion of the nuptials of Maria Teresa. It so delighted the emperor, that he offered to make the author either a count, a baron, or a privy-counsellor. Metastasio imitated the example of Aretino, and prudently refused an advancement, which would neither increase his fortune, nor improve his genius.

It is curious to find, that even these successes gave him no increased confidence in his powers. Thus, in writing to his friend Gentili, at Rome, he says, "I am

exceedingly glad to find you contented with my 'Ciro.' It cost me much trouble, and I should deserve pity if my friends were not somewhat indulgent to me. I am so discontented with myself, that I am approaching the extreme verge of uneasiness. My natural vice is doubt, and it increases with age. Long custom has hardened me against those beauties of poetry which, on their first discovery, moved and delighted me. Hence, in writing, I believe that I am always doing worse and worse, and, if necessity did not compel me to publish what I produce, I should finish nothing, or, when finished, should let it perish. You see in what a miserable condition I am, and how I labour to render myself unhappy, while endeavouring to instruct others."

The death of the Emperor Charles VI. was followed by a war, which diverted the thoughts of men from poets and dramatists to soldiers and politicians. Metastasio might have enjoyed a long period of leisure and repose, but Maria Teresa was as great an admirer of his genius as her predecessor, and the loyalty and affection with which he viewed her, in return, kept him in a state of constant and feverish anxiety for the success of her measures.

On the accession of Joseph II. he was again left to the approval of a new patron. But he had nothing to fear. He was grown so old in the service of the court, the celebrity of his dramas had contributed so largely to its glory, and his name was so closely associated in the minds of the Austrians with many years of splendour, that he possessed a kind of literary sovereignty among them, which few possessors of the imperial crown would have ventured to attack. The new monarch, however, was personally attached to him; and thus Metastasio could boast the rare felicity of having been the favourite

of three successive emperors, and of having enjoyed in the court of Vienna an uninterrupted patronage of fifty years.*

His prosperity was respected. The gentleness of his nature, his freedom from pride and every kind of envy, rendered rivals and enemies powerless. He delighted to promote the interests of others. His consciousness of defects in his own mind and writings was painfully acute; and he was proportionably ready to discover and applaud merit wherever it existed. His ample fortune enabled him to indulge his hospitable disposition, and not only his own countrymen, but strangers from every land, found a ready welcome at his house. Nothing was denied these visitors but the portions of time which he rigidly reserved for study. His habits of living had always been remarkable for regularity. "I cannot write," he urged, "if I cease to read and meditate; but this will be the case, if my hours be not properly assigned, and strictly given to known duties."

This prosperous and unruffled course of life made few ravages on the frame or constitution of the poet. At the age of eighty-four he was still in the enjoyment of his usual health, and all the powers of his mind. His last sickness was incurred by imprudent exposure to the weather. He had a passion for gorgeous spectacles, partly natural, but rendered greater by his studies and employments. In the spring of 1782 Pope Pius made a public entrance into Vienna, characterised by more than usual pomp. Metastasio watched the procession from an open balcony with all the delight of youth. Though warned of danger, exposed as he was to a biting wind,

* "His life," it has been said, "was a happy series of gracious combinations: an uninterrupted progress of honours and poetic triumphs."—*Elogio Accademico*. Roma, 1782.

nothing could induce him to retire, till the last vestige of the spectacle had disappeared. The next day, he was found to be suffering from a severe cold. Symptoms of fever quickly succeeded; and it soon became evident both to himself and others that he was rapidly sinking. He had long, we are told, cultivated religious sentiments*, and had led a life as pious as it was prosperous. Death seemed to have no terrors for him; and he exhibited in his last hours the same gentle and tranquil dispositions as those which had marked his progress through life.

With all his success and brilliant talents, Metastasio was essentially deficient in that strength and freedom of spirit so essential to a dramatic writer of the highest class. But he possessed all the other requisites of a dramatist—pure moral feeling, a quick conception of what is noblest in human character, and a not less thorough understanding of the motives which impel the basest to action. He had a command over his language which enabled him to paint the various passions in the most appropriate colours; he knew by the constant exercise of that internal sight which seems peculiar to dramatic genius, what conceptions of his mind could be properly made visible to the outward eye, and under what forms they should appear; his own heart was keenly susceptible of those emotions which it is the province of the drama to excite; he was passionately fond of all the brilliant accompaniments which characterised the scenic representations of his age and country; and, lastly, he was profoundly versed in the study of the greatest dramatic authors of antiquity, and of the Corneilles and the Racines of modern times.

It was with these advantages of talent and education

* Abate Cordara, *Discorso*. Alessandria, 1782.

that he undertook to obey the commands of the Viceroy of Naples, and it is not impossible that the particular circumstances under which he had to make the first trial of his genius tended to confine it to that class of composition on which he continued to expend its highest energies. The popular dramas of the age were little superior, in their intellectual character, to the public shows and processions which amused the people in the streets. Their principal interest, as has been said, was dependent on the music and scenery; and the author who could bring the gayest pageants into his piece, seems to have stood the best chance of amusing his audience. The genius of Metastasio disdained to imitate the puerile and insipid writers who had preceded him, but he was obliged to obey the long-formed taste of the public, and hence he produced a species of drama, which combined all that could charm and fascinate the senses, with as much of intellectual power and beauty as the minds of his audience were capable of comprehending. Music and scenery still exercised their magic influence, but poetry asserted its supremacy; the senses were still lulled into rapture by exquisite harmony and gorgeous displays, but the passions were roused, and pity and terror kept awake to distinct objects of thought, by the force of language. His productions, therefore, for a people intellectually and morally constituted like his audience, were perfect; and the influence which they exercised at Naples, they exercised at Rome, and at Vienna, and will exercise, wherever the character of the court, or people, may be compounded of similar attributes to that of the Neapolitan when he wrote.

In the same manner we may account for his too copious mixture of love adventures with representations of the noblest characters, and the most exalted and animating moral sentiments. So strikingly was the suscep-

tibility of the public displayed in this respect, that on the performance of his "Dido" at Rome, the applause of the audience at the speech of the queen, "Son regina, e sono amante," was so violent, that it seemed as if the theatre was shaken from its foundations; and the Abate Cordara remarks, that, his ecclesiastical habit not suffering him to go to the theatre, he could catch the rumour in his cell, for nothing was talked of in Rome for several days but that drama. The opinions of his critics upon his various productions often differ, but in speaking of them himself, he was accustomed to say, that, if he could save but one of his operas, it should be the "Attilio Regolo."

Metastasio, some years before his death, had the sorrow of seeing the opera fast declining from the state of perfection to which he had raised it. It was no genius, indeed, inferior to his own, that could have preserved it in its original beauty. One shade more of splendour in the spectacle, and the drama was lost, — one degree less of fervour and sweetness in the poetry, and the music became triumphant. Metastasio possessed in himself a union of qualities for succeeding in his object, for he was a profound musician as well as an excellent poet, and thus understood how the arts, from the union of which the opera springs, might be united without either of them eclipsing the other. The writers who succeeded him possessed neither his power nor his judgment, and the nature of the opera offers constant temptations to bad taste. It was discovered, that the absurdest inventions, the weakest poetry, the most unnatural sentiments, might be passed off with the assistance of fine music, and even gain applause. Hence the Italian dramatic Muse again sank to the earth, like a bird which had had only sufficient strength to take one short and rapid flight into its native element.

APOSTOLO ZENO, FILICAIA, ETC.

AMONG the contemporaries of Metastasio, Apostolo Zeno merits the first rank, not more on account of the station which he occupied as one of the poets of his age, than on that of the extensive erudition for which he was remarkable, and which so frequently brings his name before the student of literary history. This learned man was born at Venice, December 3rd, 1668. His father, who was a physician of note, died while he was still a child, and left him and his brother Nicolaus to the care of their mother, who shortly after married a nobleman, Antonio Cornelio. The two brothers were placed at an early age under the best masters ; but Apostolo speedily distinguished himself by the superiority of his intellect and his greater application. In 1684, he published some short Latin poems on passing public events, and this, his first appearance as an author, was sufficiently encouraging to induce him to proceed. His next production was a translation into Italian verse of the Satires of Persius, followed by several minor compositions. After having acquired considerable notice by these poems, and by some melodramas which introduced him to the patronage of the Duke of Modena, he began to devote himself to the study of history and biography, and made preparations for writing the lives of the celebrated poets of his country, a work which would have been invaluable, if completed. In the year 1718, he was invited to Vienna, where he enjoyed for eleven years the united offices of poet laureate and historiographer. At the end of that period he began

to feel an unconquerable desire to return to his native country; and as Metastasio had already proved his ability to supply the place which he occupied, he obtained permission to retire, the emperor securing to him his yearly stipend, on the flattering condition, that he should annually furnish the court with a sacred drama.

On his return to Venice he resumed his usual occupations, and carried on, in conjunction with his brother, the publication of the "Ephemerides." This work was continued till the death of his fellow-labourer, when the age and melancholy of Apostolo incapacitated him from sustaining the exertion it demanded. He still, however, employed himself on subjects connected with history, both civil and literary. His collection of medals was one of the finest in Europe, and his extensive acquaintance with the minutest portions of literary history is evidenced by his notes to Fontanini's "Eloquenzia Italiana."

The emperor's command, which had imposed upon him the necessity of continuing to write a sacred drama annually, was not neglected. Of the works thus produced, he was accustomed to say, that he would rather have them preserved than all the rest of his writings*; and especially the "Gerusalemme," "because," he observed, "it was nearly all written at the foot of the Cross."

Zeno lived to his eighty-first year, and left behind him one of the best and brightest characters that can be found attached to a name of celebrity. His perfect freedom from selfishness, and from the envy which so frequently infects the literary character, — his fervent

* He had written, it is said, no fewer than sixty operas. — *Sismondi, Litt. (South).*

piety, the morality of his actions, and the purity and careful veracity of his conversation, were all so many steps by which he raised himself above the level of his contemporaries in moral worth, as by his learning and application he rose above them in literature. The amiable Metastasio bore testimony to the merits of his predecessor, and honoured him both as a man and a poet.

VICENTIO FILICAIA was born at Florence, in the month of December 1642 *: "a most gloomy period," says Fabroni, "and one which proved almost fatal to elegant literature, such was the error and thick darkness which overspread the minds of those who desired to cultivate the Muses." The family of our poet, on both the father's and the mother's side, was ancient and noble. At an early age he was entered at the Jesuits' College, where he acquired the foundation of a learned education, and was then sent to Pisa to complete his studies, and accomplish himself in the knowledge of jurisprudence. But poetry, the destined rival of that science with most young men like Filicaia, drew him repeatedly from his proper pursuits, and having fallen in love with a young lady who resided near his lodgings, his passion for versifying grew every day stronger. The object of his affections died soon after he became acquainted with her; and the hours which he had before spent in seeking to gain her affections, he now felt it a sort of duty to employ in lamenting her early death. But at length growing weary of these amatory strains, he flung all his manuscripts into the fire, and took a solemn oath never more to write

* Fabroni, *Vita Ital.* 1781.

poetry except on sacred or heroic subjects. Fortunately for his reputation, he kept his word, and his odes breathe the truest spirit of the lyric Muse. His fame was speedily and extensively spread abroad, and Christina queen of Sweden, became one of his warmest admirers. So munificent was her patronage, that he was accustomed to say, that, whenever he looked either at his home, his children, or his wife, he was reminded of some favour bestowed on him by the queen.

On the death of Christina, Filicaia found himself involved in pecuniary difficulties. From these he was relieved by the timely aid of Cosmo III., who appointed him to the government of Volterra, where he was universally esteemed for his justice and urbanity.

Thus restored to the enjoyment of tranquillity, and possessing an income sufficient for his support and that of his family, Filicaia resumed his literary labours with great ardour, and devoted his attention especially to the composition of Latin poetry. The originality of his style was highly praised, and he acquired so much popularity that the English ambassador at the court of Florence sent copies of his best odes to England, where they met with the most extravagant applause from Lord Somers, and several other noblemen. The verses, however, which obtained these praises were sufficiently complimentary to English feelings; and Fabroni sarcastically observes, "*Non poterant non esse acceptissima populo, propriorum meritorum laudatori superbo,*" — They could not be otherwise than most acceptable to a people who proudly laud their own merits.

The inhabitants of Volterra, who regarded him as a parent, were anxious to retain him among them, but Cosmo thought proper to remove him to Pisa in the year 1700. He continued there about two years, at the

end of which period he returned to Florence, much improved in his circumstances by the liberal conduct of the duke. He died in the year 1707.

ALEXANDER GUIDI may here also be mentioned as one of the few poets who stand forth from the crowd of writers, who did so little in this age to render it one of importance in the history of Italian literature. He was born at Pavia, in June 1650, and studied with success at Parma, where he published a collection of his miscellaneous poetry in the year 1681. He also brought out, the same year, his melodrama entitled "*Amalasunta*," which was performed, or rather sung, in the College of Music. Soon after this, he went to Rome, and obtained the favourable notice of Queen Christina and other powerful personages. The former, discovering the excellence of his genius the more she conversed with him, requested the Duke of Parma, in whose employment he had lived for several years, to allow him to enter her service. The request was granted, and Guidi took up his residence in Rome. There he wrote his fable of "*Endymion*," his only work of importance. He died in 1712, being engaged, at the time, in turning some homilies into verse, with the expectation of gaining the favour of Pope Clement XI.

GIUSEPPE PARINI.



GIUSEPPE PARINI was born in May 1729. His parents were peasants, who possessed a very small and poor farm, on the banks of Lake Pusiano, about twenty miles from Milan. Notwithstanding their scanty means, they resolved to give Giuseppe a learned education, and in due time he was taken to Milan, and entered as a student in the Academy Arcimboldi. The failure of his father's strength and means obliged him, long before the completion of his course, to seek support as a copyist. In the midst of the struggle between his ambition as a student, and the want of daily bread, his own health gave way. He had suffered in childhood from a defect in muscular power. The weakness now became more and more manifest, and a paralytic attack deprived him of the use of his limbs, never wholly recovered.

While only able to move about with great effort, he received intelligence of the death of his father. There was no support left for his aged mother, unless he could supply it. He had now happily gained reputation as a sound scholar. The wealthy people of the neighbourhood, therefore, were rejoiced when it was announced that he was ready to give private lessons, to young or old, in any branch of science or literature. He was soon able to

make a comfortable home for his mother. Indescribably happy were the hours which they spent together in the intervals of his toil. Mother and son knew each other too well not to be able to think, and work, in silence till the evening meal.

No better discipline could have been had than that to which Parini was thus undesignedly submitted. His mind, his affections, his moral nature, derived strength from the circumstances in which necessity had placed him. But with the growth of his intellectual powers, came the wish for display. The opportunity was afforded by the publication of a work entitled, "I Pregiudizj delle Umane Lettere." Parini joined with others in a bitter dispute on the principles of this treatise. The force and ingenuity of his arguments were universally admired, but the controversy itself became so furious, that its continuance was prohibited by an order from government.

His literary career thus begun, he determined upon writing some work which might fairly give him a place among the authors of his country. Tragedy was thought of, but neither his own genius, nor the state of public affairs, encouraged him to attempt dramatic writing. Satire had its difficulties, but it was the best suited to his temper. He had now seen somewhat of the world, and he felt that, if he could write at all, he could describe manners and character.

After much consideration, and many experiments, Parini fixed upon a model for language and versification. It was a satirical drama, entitled, "Femia," written by Martelli in blank verse, and indicating that medium style, well adapted for the thoughts which a moral poet may be supposed anxious to convey. The plan of "Il Giorno" was easily conceived and drawn, and as soon as

some portions of the poem were written, the author submitted them to the judgment of the literary friends on whose tastes he could best depend. They unanimously encouraged him to proceed. Among the foremost to praise the design, and promise patronage, was the Austrian plenipotentiary, Count di Firmian.

The first part of "*Il Giorno*," "*Il Mattino*," appeared in 1763, and two years after, "*Il Mezzogiorno*." Each acquired a large circulation, and the author became at once the most popular writer of the day. Not only were readers in general delighted with the liveliness of the satire, but literary men saw with wonder to what perfection Parini had brought blank verse. Many writers, of late, had attempted to discard rhyme, but on comparing Parini's neat and flowing lines with their own, most of them determined to attempt blank verse no more, having at length discovered that to vary and adjust its pauses, so as to secure both variety and harmony, is much more difficult than to find rhymes. Frugoni himself said, on reading Parini's "*Mattino*," that he now saw, he had never known how to write blank verse, though he formerly thought himself very skilful in it. The two poets became thenceforward intimately acquainted.

The Count Firmian, who had so warmly encouraged the publication of the "*Mattino*," was not backward in manifesting his friendship for the author after its publication. He first made him editor of the *Gazette*, and next, in 1769, appointed him professor of the *Belles Lettres* in the Palatine School, establishing a new chair in the academy solely for that purpose, and notwithstanding the strong opposition of the Jesuits. Parini, who had been previously offered the professorship of eloquence in the University of Parma, but refused it, entered upon his present duties with a mind long enriched

by learning, with a well-exercised taste, and great natural abilities, as well as a strong inclination for the subject which he was about to teach.

His next appointment was to the professorship of eloquence in the *Gymnasium di Brera*, and it was during the first year spent in that situation that he composed the celebrated course of lectures published in his works. Being afterwards called to the chair of the fine arts, he performed his duties with the same indefatigable zeal as in his other situations. The lectures he delivered on the various subjects above mentioned were always numerously attended by both natives and foreigners, who were so deeply interested, it is said, by the noble truths which he mixed up with his literary discourses, that they admired him as an example as well as a preceptor. A still higher compliment is paid him, when the advocate *Reina* says, that his country owes to *Parini* the preservation of good taste, and that intellectual culture which has so frequently raised a barrier against the spread of foreign corruption.

The reputation which he acquired by his lectures on the fine arts, was little less extensive than that which rewarded his labours on subjects purely literary. Some of the best artists from various parts of the country came to ask his advice, and very often to obtain plans or outlines of subjects, many of which still exist, the productions of *Parini's* ability. *Vasari's* "*Lives of the Painters*" was one of his most favourite works.

His taste for the arts and his poetic genius were both called into exercise on the arrival of the Archduke *Ferdinand*. Count *Firmian*, in order to celebrate his marriage with *Maria Beatrice of Este*, appointed a nuptial drama to be performed with the "*Ruggiero*" of *Metastasio*. *Parini* was accordingly directed to prepare one

for the occasion, and he proved his judgment in a slight degree by the manner in which he executed his task. By all men of sense and real poetic feeling, the opera, when divested of that peculiar charm which derives from the exquisite strains of Metastasio, was regarded as a burlesque on the genuine drama, and the powerful genius of Alfieri having already begun to excite the attention of Italy, such men as Parini would naturally feel unwilling to class themselves with the mere slaves of musicians and scene-painters. The count, however, was not to be disobeyed, and our poet set about the opera; but he resolved to avoid, as much as possible, the absurdity of introducing songs into a piece where natural and human passions are to be excited by probable occurrences or representations. He therefore, at once drew his characters and fable from the doubtful realms of fancy, and instead of historical heroes, brought gods and demi-gods on the stage. His plan was equally ingenious and philosophical. Neither nature nor probability can be easily offended when neither the nature of the beings represented, nor their mode of action, is understood. The introduction of music and singing, consequently, when the drama is composed of such materials as these, produces no feeling of absurdity in the mind, but tends to keep it in that pleasing state of bewilderment and uncertainty, which always attends the idea, that we are present among beings of a different order and nature to ourselves.

Parini succeeded in satisfying his patron, and his opera was greatly admired for the clearness and elegance of the style, the ingenuity of the plot, and the manner in which it was developed. The execution of this task was succeeded by the imposition of another, the drawing out of a plan for the decoration of a palace which the

archduke erected on the site of the old theatre, lately taken down for that purpose. In performing his duty, the poet had often to contend with the prince respecting the embellishments of the hall of audience, which the latter wished to have adorned with paintings of the Judgment of Paris, but which the poet, with far better taste and judgment, determined to have decorated with representations of a nature better fitted to the character of the place.

But these employments of his ability were suited to his inclination, and he willingly obeyed his superiors, when their calls upon his talents might be obeyed to the advantage of his favourite arts, and consistently with his honesty and reputation. This he felt not to be the case, when, on the death of Maria Theresa, he was desired by the new Società Patriotica, of which he had been chosen a member, to compose a funeral oration in praise of the deceased empress. He had unfortunately not sufficient resolution to express his feelings at once on the subject, or he did not, perhaps, see at first how he must compromise his private sentiments to do justice as a public eulogist. He had no sooner, however, begun to compose his oration, than he discovered the insuperable difficulties with which, feeling as he did, he should have to contend. In vain, therefore, did he endeavour to proceed; his inventive genius refused to assist him; he could draw no topics from the suggestions of his favourite principles. Thus, after a useless struggle, he found himself obliged to accept the invitation of a friend to pass some time in the country, where he hoped he might be more favourably disposed for thinking. And had it been merely from want of ability to reflect, the change of scene, and the repose which he enjoyed in his retreat might have had the desired effect, but Maria Theresa's actions and principles

still appeared in the same light to the free-minded, patriotic poet; and every time he recollected that the empress favoured the Inquisition, and that her boasted generosity was but a squandering of the wealth which was not her own, the pen fell from his hands. With all the fertile wit and ready eloquence which produced the "Matteo," he could find neither thoughts nor expressions to honour the memory of Metastasio's patroness.

But the agitation of mind which he suffered, while attempting to execute this unprofitable task, had so serious an effect upon his nerves, that he was unable to compose himself to the performance of his usual labours, and he for some time heard the public calling on him, from every quarter, to give them the succeeding parts of his popular poem, without the power to fulfil their request, or take advantage of so favourable an opportunity for promoting his reputation. "Il Vespro" and "La Notte," however, were at length resumed. Again also he turned his attention to lyrical composition, and formed the hope of being one day able to excel the most celebrated of his countrymen in that species of poetry. "It appeared to him," says Reina, "that the rich, harmonious, and fascinating language of Italy, which, in the tender and delicate forms of the original Petrarch, abounds with so much grace, had not been carried, either by Bernardo Tasso or by Chiabrera, to that degree of elegance, and grandeur of expression, which are the peculiar properties of Greek and Latin lyric poetry, and which those two excellent poets sought to imitate, but never reached."*

The odes and sonnets of Parini are justly admired by his countrymen, who rank them among the best specimens in their language of the species of composition to which

* Vita, Opera.

they belong. But the attention of the amiable author was in the meantime forcibly attracted to the affairs of his country, and in fact of Europe. On the death of Count Firmian, he lost his best friend, and the only sure protector he had ever possessed. The freedom of his sentiments, his satires, and the inflexible severity of his manners, had on the other hand, created him numerous enemies, and he speedily found himself on the point of being reduced to the lowest condition of poverty. His reputation, the best safeguard in any country against violence, and the influence of the Counsellor Pecci, who continued his friend, alone saved him from losing the professorship, on which he wholly depended for the supply of his moderate wants.

The accession and reforms of the Emperor Joseph the Second were hailed by Parini as greatly tending to produce that public happiness and security which it was his ardent prayer to see established throughout the world. His political sentiments being thus set at rest for a time, he devoted himself without disturbance to the duties of his professorship, and other literary occupations, finding at the same time another occasion for the exercise of his taste for the fine arts, in the composition of subjects for the decoration of the new Palazzo Belgiojoso.

At the breaking out of the French revolution, his mind was again immersed in the troubled sea of politics. As a patriot, he looked with deep anxiety at the progress of events which might in the end confer freedom on his own country; and as a philosopher, he could not but contemplate them with the liveliest interest theoretically. They displayed the action of those principles on society, respecting the nature and influence of which he had been speculating through a great portion of his life. Even poetry and its charms seem to have yielded to the

exciting thoughts to which his political enthusiasm at this period gave birth. The Paris journals were read by him with an avidity which nearly cost him the sight of one of his eyes ; and to the constant perusal of the public prints, he added the serious study of all the great political theories bearing, in any way, upon the subjects which so completely occupied his mind. We must not, however, omit to mention, as it affords an admirable trait of the purity and honesty of Parini's character, that as a public teacher, he never allowed himself to take advantage of his influence over the youths whom he instructed, to infuse his private opinions, or constrain them to espouse a cause, the merits or defects of which they were incapable of estimating for themselves.

The Austrian throne, in the meantime, was ascended by Leopold the Second, and on his passing through Milan, he performed an act of generosity which well became his imperial character. Happening to see, as he was driving down one of the streets, a venerable-looking man, who, dreadfully lame and infirm, was helping himself along with a stick, he asked one of his courtiers if he knew who it was. "It is Parini," was the reply ; and the emperor, astonished and distressed that a man of such celebrity and genius should be forced to labour in so bad a state of health through the streets on foot, immediately ordered that a larger stipend should be paid him. To the disgrace of those whose duty it was to fulfil the royal command, Parini was left to make the best of his crutch and narrow stipend as before.

In conformity with the wishes of the Archduchess, Maria Beatrice of Este, he had, after great labour and hesitation, prepared the remaining portions of his poem for the press, and revised the part already published. Just as the work was completed, the French took pos-

session of Milan, and he trusted that the day was arrived when a new order of things would be commenced, and a wider gate opened to literature and philosophy. One of the first acts, indeed, of the conqueror was to raise the poet to that station among his fellow-citizens which he so richly merited by his patriotism, his learning, and experience. But Parini, as a member of the municipal government, was still the same frank and severe-minded man which he was when satirising effeminate nobles; and military tyrants are not often more open to the counsels of philosophers and men of worth, than the viceroys and deputies of imperial courts. After a few weeks, therefore, of political labour as a magistrate, finding that he could do little good by the longer possession of his office, our poet resigned, and on doing so, gave all the proceeds of his magistracy to the poor of his parish, avoiding the appearance of ostentation by performing this act of beneficence secretly.

In the midst of all the factions, with their attendant consequences, which distracted Italy at this period, he lived, it is said, a life of freedom and tranquillity. But the tranquillity which Parini enjoyed, when freed from public office, was not the result of idleness or indifference. His anxiety for the welfare of his country and of Europe was never diminished, and he watched the rapid changes which were every day occurring, with a careful and penetrating eye. His retirement was that of a philosopher, better able to make his power felt by the secret but mighty influence of his opinions, gradually and surely diffused, than by the strength of his eloquence in the senate house. Nor did he now suspend his favourite studies while his thoughts were thus attracted to considerations of more immediate importance to mankind at large. He prepared materials for some lectures on

Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper ; and his perusal of his favourite classics was continued with the same enthusiasm as in his youth. But by this incessant study, added to the daily reading of the journals as before mentioned his sight, already severely affected, became every day worse, and he was at length obliged to submit to an operation. As this was happily attended with beneficial results, he seized upon the opportunity afforded by his recovery to complete "Il Vespro" and "La Notte," as he felt conscious that it might be the only period allowed him between his late attack and one still more fatal.

In 1799, intelligence arrived of the rapid progress of the Germans towards Milan, and Parini, it might have been supposed, would see sufficient reason to dread a formidable interruption to his tranquillity; but he remained undisturbed, and was threatened, says Reina, but not persecuted. He was now in his seventieth year, and having been for some time deprived of his usual exercise by the state of his eyes, he was attacked with dropsy, which, added to the natural infirmity of his frame, quickly reduced him to a condition of great feebleness. On the 15th of August, the day on which he died, he rose at eight o'clock in the morning, being prevented from resting by a violent sensation of heat and wearisome irritability. Two or three friends, professors in the Academy, soon after called on him, and to one of these he recited, in an elevated tone of voice, a sonnet which he had been requested to compose respecting the return of the Germans. On the arrival of his physician, he desired to be informed respecting his condition, and was answered that danger was near, but not immediately at hand. He received this intelligence with the composure that became him; and, taking them into a neighbouring apartment, continued to converse with his friends

without exhibiting any signs of agitation, or confusion of thought. Being compelled to complain of the burning heat under which he was still suffering, he observed, "Formerly it would have been believed that I was tormented by a demon. Alas! there is now no longer any belief either in a demon, or a devil, or even in the God in whom Parini believes."

It was not till two o'clock in the afternoon that he ceased from thus conversing with his friends. He then retired to his chamber, and said to a servant who attended him, that the sight of the eye which had been lately operated upon was unusually clear, and that he felt a degree of strength not natural to his weak frame. Having lain down on the bed, he shortly after expired, and with the same composure and serenity as he had evinced while conversing with his acquaintances.

The English reader may be enabled to form some idea of the style of Parini's "*Il Giorno*," or "*The Day*," by being told that it has been compared in different parts to that of Pope in his "*Rape of the Lock*," to that of Cowper in the "*Sofa*," of Virgil in the "*Georgics*," and of Crabbe "*when he is most harmonious and tender*."* The object which he proposed to himself was, the reproof of the great for their ignorance, and their wasteful expenditure of the day in dressing and in fashionable entertainments. To effect this, he invented a basis for his poem, by which he gave it some dramatic effect, and avoided the repulsive character of a mere grave reprover. Thus he introduces himself as the preceptor of a young nobleman whom he desires to instruct in the important art of "*whiling away the slow and wearisome days of life, so long and burdensome, and attended with such*

* Hobhouse. Reina. Ugoni.

insufferable annoyances." Nothing can exceed the admirable manner in which, after thus addressing the "Giovine Signora," he describes the morning as it appears in the open fields of nature, and to the good villager who rises with his wife and children at the first dawn of light, and then suddenly stops in the midst of the description with, "But what? Does your hair stiffen, like the porcupine's quills, at my words? Ah, no, Signore! this is not *your* morning." The cares of the toilette and other preparations for visiting, the methods to be pursued when the hero appears as a cavalier servente, in short all the circumstances which can be supposed to interest a fashionable, effeminate, and luxurious young man living in a society constituted like that of an Italian city, are described with the utmost precision and minuteness. But from the light and sarcastic style in which these lessons are given, the author repeatedly rises into one of superior dignity, and displays great power of language, sometimes in describing trifling occurrences as worthy of heroic verse, at others in ingenious allegories, and not unfrequently in real appeals to the feelings.

The most striking feature in Parini's character as a literary man, was the extreme severity of his critical opinions. He owed, it has been said, more to study than any other author of eminence that ever lived; and hence, probably, the scrupulousness of his taste. "Others," he was accustomed to say, "praise my writings, I cannot praise them. Now that I am old, I know in what beauty consists. If I could recall thirty years of my past life, I should compose something, perhaps, worthy of my country." In the same manner he observed, "The mediocrity, which is so good a thing in fortune, is the worst of all things in the fine arts, which should exhibit nothing except what is supremely excellent." But this

severity was strongly contrasted with that which is so often the offspring of mere insensibility and dulness. In the earliest part of Alfieri's career he pronounced him the father of the Italian drama; while of Monti he said, that the sudden and sublime flights of that writer continually threatened a fall, but he never fell.

In his latter years he made Dante and Ariosto his constant companions, observing, that the more he knew of his art the more he admired them, and the more he studied them the more they delighted him. The investigation of the Italian language in all its niceties, and unremitted practice in the employment of it in composition, he considered absolutely necessary to the attainment of any excellence as a writer. "He who knows not his own language," he would say, "cannot make his thoughts avail him as he desires; and those Italians who run after a false style, and foreign words and idioms, incur the risk of losing all precision of ideas." "Avoid," he would also say, "the mean Lombard writers, and the modern Tuscans, who have degenerated from their ancient grandeur." Even his patriotism found an additional excitement in his zeal for the purity of his language: "If we become free," he exclaimed, "we shall have a language which, if it be not at once perfected, will, at least, be proper, expressive, robust, and dignified, for a free people have everything that is proper and worthy of admiration." Reina, who has carefully recorded these memorabilia of Parini, says, that he once observed to him, while speaking of the pleasure which the publication of Machiavelli's works afforded him, that that author would teach him "to think, to speak, and to write with freedom."

From the same writer, the friend and biographer of Parini, and the editor of his works, we learn, that he

was as severe in his manners as he was in his criticisms and literary opinions. In his long and constant intercourse with the great, he was never guilty of compromising that dignity with which honesty of thought should invest every human being, but those more especially on whom the Creator has conferred the power of thinking with greater force and clearness than the rest of their species. He flattered neither vices nor follies, and the flattery which he disdained to exercise towards others, he as indignantly repulsed when offered to himself. And this trait in his character was the result of principle, not of innate moroseness. His heart was as open to friendship as it was firmly shut against the intrusion of those who sought his acquaintance as an honour, and the temptations of others who would have paid for his praises with patronage. The intimacies which he formed with persons who merited his esteem were lasting, and a new face was never seen to awaken the same signs of gladness as the sight of those with which he had been long familiar.

His love of liberty was tempered by wisdom and moderation ; and his entire system of politics rested upon divine truth. "I console myself," he said, "with the idea of the Divinity ; I find no law of human justice secure without the fears and hopes of a life to come."

It is not to be wondered at that Parini, distinguished by so many noble principles, was beloved and honoured by all who had not some interest to protect, which his virtuous and manly sentiments endangered. His influence with the people was remarkably shown in a circumstance mentioned by Reina. Some violent demagogue wanted to force him one evening, at the theatre, to join in crying death to the aristocrats, instead of which, he shouted with so terrible a voice, "Life to

the Republic ! death to no one !” that tranquillity was immediately restored. The square opposite the theatre where this occurred, is still pointed out to the stranger as the scene of a noble triumph gained by virtue over popular feeling, without the sacrifice of popular principle.

CARLO INNOCENZO FRUGONI, born at Genoa in November 1692, was the son of noble parents of ancient descent. To enable his two elder brothers to receive a fortune corresponding to their rank, he consented to become a monk, and took the vows of his order at Novi, in his seventeenth year. Talent and severe study gained him an early literary reputation. He was made professor of rhetoric first at Brescia, and then in the Clementine College at Rome.* There he became acquainted with Metastasio's patron, Gravina, and not long after with Cardinal Bentivoglio, whose patronage and friendship were not more valuable to him than his critical suggestions were to the cardinal, then engaged on his translation of Statius. Eventually Frugoni became a dependent on the court of Parma, his fortunes changing with all the revolutions of the duchy. Obligated at one time to seek refuge in Venice, he was on the point of perishing from hunger and destitution. In this state he was discovered by Count Algarotti. That nobleman introduced him to our ambassador Lord Holderness, and by their united care he was restored to health and comfort. On the final settlement of the affairs of the duchy, he returned to Parma, and found a judicious and ardent friend in the Marquis of Felino, who had himself risen from a subordinate office to be the first minister of state. By his

* *Poesie Scelte*. Brescia, 1782.

influence, Frugoni was made perpetual secretary of the Academy of Fine Arts. Two other events contributed to increase the poet's happiness at this period of his life. The monastic vows had long been a heavy burden on his conscience. His employments, his love of pleasure, and general character, were equally incompatible with the life of a monk. Application was made to successive popes to absolve him from his vows. It at length proved successful, and he had to bear, for the rest of his life, only the comparatively easy yoke of an ordinary abate. The death of his two brothers gave him some hope of inheriting the family property. From this he was excluded by the hostility of the last survivor, who left him a legacy, on condition that he should make no claim on the estate, and that he should invest the sum bequeathed in French tontines. The poet dreaded law, and yielded to necessity. But he wished to have the free disposal of his little property; and he was no less anxious to receive out of the estate a further sum sufficient to pay his debts. In his perplexity, he addressed some verses to the Genoese Senate, explanatory of his circumstances and wishes. The appeal proved successful. He was allowed to invest and bequeath the money left him according to his own judgment; and the inheritors of the bulk of his brother's fortune were obliged to grant him the sum required for the payment of his debts. Such was the vigour of his constitution, that his death, at the age of seventy-six, created general surprise.

Frugoni was a genuine poet. His various learning afforded him a plentiful store of illustration; and he had an ear capable of appreciating the nicest delicacies of versification. But while admired by many readers as one of the most original writers in his language, he has been as violently decried by others as departing, no less than Marini, from its purest models.

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

VITTORIO ALFIERI was born at Asti in Piedmont on the 17th of January, 1749, and of noble and wealthy parents. His father, somewhat past middle age, rejoiced at his birth with more than ordinary paternal delight. Having agreed to his being nursed in the country, he walked every day, winter and summer, to watch his health, and measure his growth. The fatigue occasioned by one of these walks, under a burning sun, brought on a sickness of which the good father died in a few days.*

By his mother's subsequent marriage, Victor and his sister Giulia, about two years older than himself, were left almost entirely to the care of tutors and servants. Thus early obliged to depend upon each other for all the pleasures of childhood, they listened with terror to the first mention made of their approaching separation. But Giulia had reached her eighth year; and was now to be sent to commence her education in a convent. Many were the tears shed when the day arrived for her leaving home. The grief which overwhelmed the poor, solitary brother, was deep and lasting. It quickened into premature growth all the peculiar qualities of his

* Vita di Vittorio Alfieri da Asti; Scritta da Esso.

melancholy temperament. He had delighted in the companionship of his sister, but any other was hateful to him. A natural timidity tended to increase this dislike to society. He trembled if people looked at him with attention ; and such was the increasing gloom on his mind that, young as he was, he contemplated death with pleasure, and once sought to destroy himself by eating what he supposed to be poisonous herbs.

Neither his mother nor his father-in-law was deficient in affection. But when it was reported to them that Victor made indifferent progress in his studies, they only answered with a laugh, "that a gentleman need not be as learned as a doctor." Happily for him, his paternal uncle, the Cavalier Pellegrino Alfieri, had a somewhat better notion of the education proper for a gentleman. In conformity with his advice, preparations were made for sending him to the college at Turin. He shared his mother's grief at the moment of parting ; but a new career was opening upon him ; and though only just thirteen, he had all the eagerness of curiosity and passionate desire of change which characterised his later years. An old domestic of the family was sent with him in the double capacity of servant and guardian. Alfieri loved in after years to describe the sudden importance which he assumed on this journey : his desire to exhibit all the qualities of a brave traveller ; and his comical affectation of contempt for the refinements of rank or wealth. Thus when they stopped to bait the horses at an inn on the road, he left the carriage, strutted into the yard, and feeling himself thirsty, dipped the corner of his cap into a cistern, and drank his draught of water, disdaining to use a glass. To the remonstrance of his attendant and the postilion, he gravely replied, that persons who meant to survey the

world ought early to accustom themselves to such things, and that he had drunk only as a good soldier ought to drink." "Whence" he says, "these Achilles-like notions came into my head it is impossible to tell, my mother having brought me up with a ridiculous attention to all the delicacies of the nursery."

His purse being well-filled, he was able to keep the postilions in such good humour, that they drove with extraordinary speed, and he contrasted laughingly this journey in an open carriage, through a new district, and at a flying rate, with the quiet airings in his mother's carriage carefully shut up, and never leaving the old familiar road.

He arrived at Turin between one and two in the afternoon, and charmed with the splendour of the Piazza di San Carlo, reached his uncle's house in a high state of excitement and hopefulness. "But my feelings," he says, "were far less pleasant in the evening. I found myself in a strange house, and surrounded by strangers, without my mother, without my good old tutor. The looks of my uncle were very different to those of my tender, caressing mother. All this filled me with sorrow, and made me grieve for the objects parted from the day before."

The freedom with which he was allowed to amuse himself in his new abode soon dissipated these melancholy feelings. He began to be even somewhat too exuberant in his mirth, and the Cavalier Pellegrino determined upon sending him to the academy in August, instead of October, as had been originally proposed. His account of the institution in which he was thus early entered, affords an excellent view of the state of public education in Italy in the last century. "I found myself," says he, "at the age of nine years and a half, transplanted

into the midst of unknown persons, at a distance from my friends, isolated, and abandoned, as it were, to myself: for the species of education of which I was now the subject pretended to no influence on the minds of the youths, except in regard to their studies, and heaven knows how little in that respect. No moral maxim was ever inculcated, no instruction in life was ever given us. And, in fact, was there any one who could give it us? for the tutors themselves knew nothing of the world either in theory or practice.

“The academy itself was a very sumptuous edifice, divided into four sides, in the midst of which was an immense court. Two of these sides were occupied by the students; the other two by the king’s theatre, and the royal archives. The side occupied by us, who were called of the second and third department, was opposite the latter; the first apartment being opposite the king’s theatre. Each gallery contained four chambers, severally occupied by eleven youths, over whom presided a person named the *Assistente*, generally some poor fellow, who, as his sole payment, had board and lodging free, while he studied theology or law in the university. If the *Assistente* was not a student, he was generally some old and ignorant priest. A third part of the side destined to the first apartment was occupied by the king’s pages, to the number of twenty or twenty-five, who were partially separated from us, at the opposite angle of the vast court, and close by the archives before mentioned. We, the younger students, could not have been worse situated. Close at hand was the theatre, which we were not permitted to enter above five or six times during the carnival. Our envied neighbours were the pages, who attended on the court, and who, continually hunting and riding, appeared to enjoy so much freer and happier a life than

ours. Next came the foreigners, who occupied the first apartment, almost to the exclusion of natives, and who consisted of a mixture of Northerners, English principally, Russians, and Germans, and some from other parts of Italy. It was a lodging-place to them rather than one of education, for they were restrained by no rules, except that of being in before midnight. They went to the court, the theatres, and into good or bad company, as it suited their inclination."

Our poet was placed in the third apartment, and in the middle chamber. His man Andrew, who still attended him, was become a petty tyrant, and between him and the Assistente poor Victor had little prospect of comfort. The tutors, who examined him the day after he entered the academy, put him in the fourth class, with an intimation that in three months they expected he would be fit for the third; but the teachers were even more ignorant than the priest under whom he had studied at home, and he speaks in no very flattering terms of any part of the establishment. "I was an ass among asses, and under an ass. I read Cornelius Nepos, some of Virgil's eclogues, and such things. We made stupid, nonsensical themes, so that in any well directed school we should have been considered a very miserable fourth class. I was never the last in the company; emulation spurred me on till I had surpassed or equalled the lad who stood first; but I had no sooner reached the top than I sank back into torpor and indifference. I was, perhaps, to be excused, for nothing could equal the dulness and insipidity of these studies. We translated Cornelius Nepos; but none of us, probably not even the master himself, knew anything about the men whose lives we were reading, their country, the age in which they flourished, the governments under which they lived, or even what a government was.

All our ideas were either circumscribed, or false, or confused; the teacher had no object in teaching — the students no excitement in learning. They were shameful fellows; no one watched over us, or if any one did, he knew nothing."

In November he was promoted to the humanity class and found an instructor much superior to the tutors of the lower forms. He was also excited to emulation by a youth who at first wrote better themes than his, and who could recite six hundred lines from the *Georgics*, whereas his own memory would not retain more than four hundred. The superiority of his classman sometimes choked him with rage, and prompted him occasionally to open complaint and abuse, but, on the whole, they were good friends, and the poet was generous enough to admit the merits of his rival except when smarting under a new defeat. About this period also he became possessed of an *Ariosto*, how, he was unable to remember, but he believed by purchasing it of a fellow-student with part of a fowl, allowed him every Sunday. This luxury he even resigned for six months together to another of his companions who told him stories, for which the pullet was given in payment. He speaks of it as a strange anomaly in his education, that, though he could now translate the *Georgics* without difficulty, he had not been sufficiently instructed in the language or literature of his country to be able to understand *Ariosto*.

The health of Victor was even less improved than his mind by his residence in the academy. He increased neither in height nor robustness, and was more, he says, like a little wax-candle than anything else. His uncle, having been appointed to a government, resided in Turin during only a short period of the year; and the poor

student would have been left, during many attacks of sickness and despondency, in utter loneliness, but for the kindness of a distant relation, the Count Benedetto Alfieri. This gentleman was an architect by profession, and as architect to the king had built many of the most magnificent edifices in Turin. His conversation was almost always on his favourite art, and such was his idolatrous veneration for Michael Angelo, that he never pronounced his name without taking off his hat and bowing. By a long residence in Rome he had acquired a perfect acquaintance with the Tuscan dialect, for the use of which, on his return to Turin, he was at first ridiculed by his acquaintances. "But such," observes Alfieri, "is the power of the beautiful and the true, that after a little time they discovered that he spoke a language, while they used only a rude and barbarous jargon, and they thenceforth were continually visiting him, in order to babble forth their Tuscan, especially the signors who were desirous of converting their houses into palaces."

In 1760 our student was placed under the professor of rhetoric, a man very inferior to the superintendent of the humanity-class. But the bad state of Victor's health, the ridicule which he suffered from his companions, who abused him on account of a scorbutic eruption, and his natural susceptibility to such affronts, made a deep impression on his mind; and, as he began to find comfort only in solitude, he was obliged, almost in self-defence, to employ his time in study. Ariosto had been angrily taken from him by his former tutor. He now recovered the volume; but the continual interruptions in the story wearied and perplexed him. The translation of the *Æneid* by Annibale Caro afforded him far greater amusement, and some of Metastasio's operas

would have delighted him still more, had it not been that they ended just as they were beginning to excite his sympathies,—a greater annoyance, he observed than that occasioned by the breaks in Ariosto.

The following year,—he was then but thirteen,—he entered upon philosophy, and was placed in the class de Grandi. His memory was now his whole dependance and though he could never comprehend the fourth proposition of the first book of Euclid, he contrived to make a conspicuous figure, little as he was, among “The Grand.” The lecture on the peripatetic philosophy took place after dinner, and was, according to his account only a temptation to sleep standing. Some months however, after his advancement to this class, his sister Giulia was sent to Turin, to protect her from a lover whose addresses she had shown signs of being inclined to receive, though not yet fifteen. In addition to the pleasure Victor received from her presence, he had the gratification of visiting the king’s theatre during the carnival, in company with his relation the architect. The delight with which he heard the music of the opera for the first time was unbounded. The piece was “*Il Mercato di Malmantile*,” and the performers were the best in Italy. “The brilliancy and variety of that divine music,” says he, “made a profound impression on me, leaving, if I may so speak, the track of the harmony in my ears and in my imagination, and agitating every fibre of my frame to such a degree, that for more than a week I remained sunk in a profound and extraordinary, but not unpleasing melancholy. This was attended by an utter distaste for my accustomed studies, and a singular awakening of fantastic ideas which would have enabled me to make verses, had I known how to begin, and to express the most lively emotions, had I not been

a stranger both to myself and to those who pretended to educate me. This was the first time that music took so great an effect upon me, and it long remained impressed upon my memory." Sound, he continues to observe, was the most powerful agitator of his mind, his heart, and intellect, at all periods of his life, and especially that of counter-treble and female voices. "Nothing appears to me," he says, "more affecting, more various, or even more terrible. All my tragedies have been conceived either while I was actually hearing music, or remembering it." Not long after this he was permitted to visit Cuneo, where he spent a fortnight with his uncle, and composed his first sonnet, which, though praised by many persons, was so ridiculed by the count, that from that period, till he was more than twenty-five, he never again thought of making verses.

The death of his uncle occurred a few months after this visit, and his servant Andrew, who had proved very unworthy of his trust, was dismissed for a more respectable guardian. Above four years had now been passed at Turin, and having attained the degree of Master of Arts, Victor was transferred to the first apartment, chiefly occupied by foreigners, of whom the greater number were English. Alfieri soon became initiated in their manner of living. Their table was sumptuously served: They rode much, slept long, and studied little. This kind of life produced a rapid change in the sickly young Master of Arts. His hair, which, much to his annoyance, had been shaved off during his illness, began to grow again, and his whole appearance improved. With that improvement he became desirous of fashionable dress, in which he found means to indulge himself by obtaining credit of a complacent but extortionate tailor. Having escaped at the same time from the compulsory

exercises of the schools, he was at liberty to read what he pleased ; but so little did he care for his native literature, that during a fit of industry, which lasted about three months, he confined himself to the perusal of Fleury's "Ecclesiastical History."

None of the other students who occupied the first apartment were under guardianship, and he resolved upon trying the experiment of going out by himself like the rest. He was reprimanded, and was contumacious — was punished by confinement to the College Court, but despised the decree : and thus the struggle went on between him and the superiors of the Academy, till it ended in his being made a prisoner in his chamber. He now refused to rise from his bed, and remained sunk in obstinate melancholy, resolving never to reclaim a liberty enjoyed so imperfectly, and passing his days, as he describes it, like a brute beast. The marriage of his sister Giulia at length set him free : he accompanied her and her husband into the country, and, on his return, was indulged with the liberty for which he had contended. At the same time, also, he acquired greater command over the fortune left him by his father. The first use he made of his money was to buy a horse, of which he was so fond, that his anxiety, if it ailed anything, which it often did, would keep him awake all the night ; but, by the end of the year, he not only possessed this first and special favourite, but had a stud of seven.

Nobleness and generosity of nature were not less evident in Alfieri's disposition, at this period, than his love of horses and rich clothes. Possessing a greater command of money than most of the other young men in the Academy, even those of high birth, whose fathers were still living, he was able to indulge in luxuries which to them were unattainable. But he was as free from vulgar

vanity as he was fond of making a figure among his equals. Thus, whenever he had procured a new dress for some particular occasion, or to rival a proud companion, he always took care to pull it off before rejoining the rest of his fellow-students, or to conceal it, if they came to his rooms, blushing, he says, as if he had been guilty of some crime, when they chanced to see him in it. "And such, in fact," he continues, "I felt in my heart it was to have, and much more, to make a show of those things which my friends could not procure." On this principle of loving grandeur, but subjecting his pride to his kindness of heart, he prevailed upon his guardian, after great contention, to let him purchase a very elegant carriage, a thing ridiculous enough, as he observes, for a lad of sixteen, and in a little city like Turin; but, after he had obtained it, he was ashamed of riding in it while he saw his friends walking, and it was, therefore, scarcely ever used. He still kept up his number of horses, and this only because he could indulge his humour in them without exciting any degree of envy in his companions,—a feeling more than counterbalanced by his stud being always as much at their service as his own.

Being now of an age to leave the Academy, he was appointed to an ensigncy in the provincial regiment of Asti, and joined his company in September 1766. Very few military duties were imposed upon him as an officer in the Asti militia. Such as they were, he fulfilled them with great exactness, but "with great abhorrence." "I never," he adds, "could adapt myself to that chain of graduated dependence called subordination, and which, though truly enough the soul of military discipline, could not become the soul of the future tragic poet."

Soon weary of an inactive life, he obtained, with some difficulty, the permission of the king, and of his relatives,

to visit various parts of Italy under the guidance of an English Catholic, who was tutor to two young men, Fleming and a Dutchman, students in the Academy. At Milan, Alfieri afforded another notable proof of his utter indifference to Italian literature. In the Ambrosian Library he was shown an autograph of Petrarch; at the horror of the librarian, he pushed it aside, saying it was "nothing to him." He accounts for his conduct in this affair by observing, "that he had had, at the bottom of his heart, a secret ill will against the said Petrarch for some years before, for when he was a philosopher, having taken up his poems, he could not for the world discover his meaning, on which account he had enrolled himself with the French, and other presumptuous ignoramuses, setting him down as a sectarian and a babble of cold conceits." At Florence, where they arrived in October, he was somewhat affected at the sight of Michael Angelo's tomb, and the thought suddenly rose in his mind, that those only were the truly great men who had left something lasting behind them. With less complacency he records, that, instead of taking advantage of his month's residence in the Tuscan capital to improve his knowledge of his own language, he employed the whole time in studying English.

In December the travellers reached Rome, and Alfieri visited the usual objects of curiosity, going to St. Peter's twice a day, and examining it with laudable patience and attention. From Rome they proceeded to Naples, and, after staying there some weeks, our poet obtained permission, through the influence of the Sardinian ambassador, to bid farewell to his English tutor, and pursue his tour without any one to interfere with his inclination. He immediately returned to Rome, whence he made another application to his trustees for leave to visit

France, England, and Holland. He was again successful; but his guardian accompanied the permission with an intimation that he should allow him but 1500 zecchins for the journey, 1200 having been thought sufficient for that which he was at present making. Alfieri considered the addition of 300 zecchins too little, when the much greater length of the journey was remembered; but fearing, if he made any complaint, that an order might be sent for his return, he quietly resolved to meet the difficulty by saving all he could before he crossed the Alps, and out of the sum allowed for his Italian tour. Thus he began to know what parsimony was, and he accuses himself of having been guilty of keeping back the wages of his faithful servant Elia, and of stinting him to such a degree, that the poor fellow, between whom and his master there existed the most cordial attachment, declared at last, that he should be driven to rob for his food. Proud and impatient as he was, too, he determined to travel with a vetturino instead of by post, and submitted to the torture of riding a miserable beast all the way to Loretto, where his weariness at length got the better of his frugality.

Venice delighted him, but only for a short time. He again became subject to the gloom which oppressed him in childhood. "I passed," he says, "the greater part of my time at Venice alone, and without leaving the hotel. My only amusement was to stand at the window, and converse by signs with a young lady in the opposite house. The long, weary hours which remained were spent in sleeping, in ruminating on I know not what, or in complaining I knew not why. Many years after, when I could reflect better, I found that this was a periodical affection, which occurred every year, in the spring: generally in April, sometimes not till June, and

that it attacked me with more or less severity, in proportion as my heart and mind were more or less empty and unemployed.* In the same manner, I have since observed, comparing my mind to an excellent barometer, that I have more or less ability to compose according to the less or greater weight of the atmosphere; that a total stupidity seizes me during the violent solstitial or equinoctial gales; that I am infinitely less clear in the evening than in the morning; and that I have a great deal more fancy, enthusiasm, and aptitude for invention in the coldest winters and hottest summers, than in moderate seasons. This my materialism, which I believe to be common, more or less, to all men of delicate nerves, has, with the aid of time, greatly lessened my conceit of the little I have done well, as it has also diminished, in great measure, my shame for the much I have done ill, especially in my art, being fully convinced that it was not in my power, in the seasons which I mention, to do otherwise."

To a person in sound health this reasoning appears sufficiently unsubstantial, and the sufferings of which it speaks awake little pity in the minds of those who have to stretch their imagination to conceive the power of an imaginary affliction. But our real pains and pleasures, of every kind, are so much heightened by fancy, and are so little, at any time, increased or lessened by reason, that the error seems on the side of those who refuse to place the unsubstantial grievances of the hypochondriac in the same rank with the ills which torture men's frames, or ruin their fortunes. The question, however, might have been fairly asked Alfieri, who excused his having written badly when the season was too hot, or too cold,

* Epoca Terza, Cap. Terzo.

or when the wind was in a wrong quarter, "Why he wrote at all at those times?" for he, of course, had no remarkable impulse to composition at a period when to compose was a pain and labour, and he had, therefore, no spell upon his mind to deceive him as to his incapacity for thinking or giving birth to his thoughts. When the question is one of morality, it assumes a more serious aspect; and there are few persons who respect humanity, or place a due value on the means which exist for raising and improving it, who would willingly believe that its noblest attributes can be irresistibly subject to the change of seasons and the atmosphere.

After a dull and useless sojourn, Alfieri left Venice, and embarked at Genoa for Toulon. Not pleased with the aspect of that place, he hastened to Marseilles, where the theatre, and the pleasure of bathing morning and evening from a lone and rocky point of the shore, put him in good humour with both himself and the city. In relating this part of his story, he repeats the observation he had already made several times. "I could have composed much poetry there, if I had known how to write either in prose or verse, or in any language whatever."

But the amusements which he enjoyed at Marseilles soon tired, and he set off for Paris on the 10th of August, travelling *ferocemente dalla frenesia*, and more like a fugitive than a tourist. In this manner he hastened to Lyons, passing every object on the road, however worthy of notice, without the slightest regard. "Neither Aix, with its magnificent and smiling scenery; nor Avignon, once the seat of the Papacy, and the burial-place of the celebrated Laura; nor Vaucluse, the residence so long of our divine Petrarch—nothing could divert me from flying, straight as an arrow, towards Paris. At Lyons mere weariness compelled me to rest two nights

and a day ; and setting out, at the end of that time, with the same fury as before, I reached Paris, by way of Burgundy, in less than three days."

The cloudy skies, narrow streets, untasteful buildings, and bad smells which offended his senses on entering the capital of France, made him reflect for a moment with regret on the serene atmosphere and noble edifices which he had left behind. His subsequent introduction to the king, and to the best society of the place, did not alter his first impressions, and he gladly embraced the opportunity of proceeding to England in the company of the ambassador's nephew, a gay and talkative young man who made a rough jest of his melancholy humour and fastidiousness, but contributed, by his good-nature and anecdotes of love-adventures, to render the journey agreeable. It is pleasant to hear the poet speak of the feelings with which he first beheld London. "As much as the first sight of Paris disgusted me, that of England, and especially of London, pleased me. The streets, the inns, the houses, the women, the universal comfort, the life and activity of that island,—the neatness and convenience of the houses, though very small, the absence of beggars, the constant circulation of money, the industry, visible equally in the provinces as in the capital—all these endowments of that fortunate and free country captivated me at the first sight, nor has my opinion been at all changed, though I have visited it twice since."

His travelling companion was a relative of the Prince di Masserano, ambassador from Spain, and by him he received introductions to the best families in town. A visit to Bath, Bristol, Salisbury, and other provincial towns, rendered him still more satisfied with England. The aspect of the country, the simple customs, the fair

and modest women, and above all, the equitable government, and the true liberty which is its offspring—these, he continues, were sufficient to make him disregard the unpleasantness of the climate, the melancholy so common here, and the ruinous dearness of living.

But notwithstanding his favourable opinion of England and English customs, he set out on the 1st of June for Holland, and arriving at the Hague, when the fine weather made everything look cheerful around him, he compared the aspect of the country, the wealth and industry of the people, and their free institutions, with the corresponding objects which had so charmed him in England.

At the Hague, he became acquainted with a lady, whose affections were already engaged, but whose beauty attracted his attention, and inspired him with a passion little honourable either in its nature or results. This wild and hopeless passion brought with it some weeks of deserved wretchedness. He experienced the horrors of despair, and resolving to die, sent for a surgeon to bleed him. As soon as the operator departed, he tore off the bandages, and resigned himself to death. But his faithful Elia had suspected his intentions. They were frustrated by his caution, and Alfieri confesses that he was not unwilling to be kept alive.

Shortly after this affair, he returned to Italy, and at the beginning of winter found himself safely lodged in his sister's villa, after an absence from his country of two years and some days. He had now nothing to occupy his attention, and as he had purchased several books in passing through Geneva, he, for the first time in his life, thought of seeking relief from weariness and melancholy in study. But it was difficult for him to decide on what to read. Dante, Petrarch, and Tasso,

lay far beyond the reach of his present sympathies or notions. Rousseau and Voltaire seemed his only resource. The "*Nouvelle Éloïse*" had peculiar attractions for his excited mind, only slowly recovering from its late shock. But he even already began to criticise the works which he read, and to determine the value which they ought to bear as fruits of intellectual power. Thus he says of Rousseau's celebrated romance: "I tried again and again to read it, but I found it so full of mannerisms and questionings; of affected sentiment without any real feeling; of so much heat, the produce of the head, with so much coldness of heart, that I never could get to the end even of the first volume." Portions of Voltaire and Helvetius were read with greater interest; but all these authors were not long after laid aside for one of a different and much more practical character. The *Lives of Plutarch* awakened his powerful intellect to a consciousness of its noblest qualities. He read several of them four or five times, and was sometimes, he says, so affected by the narrative, that any one listening to his expression of rage, regret, or admiration, would have thought him mad. "Often," says he, "I sprang upon my feet with agitation and almost out of myself, and with tears, lamentation, and madness, raved to recollect that I was born in Piedmont,—born in an age when nothing could be either done or said, and in a country where it was almost useless to think or understand." He now also began to study astronomy, and though not able to overcome any better than formerly the difficulties of geometry, he comprehended sufficiently well the motions of the heavenly bodies to engage in the frequent contemplation of their laws.

These were propitious signs of the change which would, at no very distant day, take place in the intellectual

condition of our poet. He had begun to discriminate between false and true representations of nature—to comprehend how noble actions constitute the fountain-head of poetry ; and he had learned, above all, both by historical study and by that of astronomy, to free his mind from its narrow, individual boundaries, to forget Turin, and the eighteenth century, in his sympathy with the great and free of distant times and countries, and to annihilate the littlenesses of prejudice by making himself free of the universe.

It was while his mind was thus beginning to acquire new vigour, that his friends conceived the idea of marrying him to a rich heiress of Turin, and of curing by that means both his melancholy and his love of wandering. At first he felt the most violent repugnance to the proposition ; but the beautiful black eyes of the lady, and still more her large fortune, reconciled him by degrees to the thought of becoming a husband. His original conceit and superciliousness were rightly punished. Scarcely had he made himself contented, and even happy, at the prospect before him, when a gentleman, whose family had great influence with the king, and who was himself very amiable, stepped in, and married the lady without delay.

“The girl did well for her own happiness, and well for mine too,” says Alfieri, “for if I had married I should certainly never have been a poet.” He acknowledges that he blushed, on remembering the baseness of which he had been guilty in proposing to marry from a motive of avarice, but at the same time he endeavours to excuse his falling into the temptation. It had been his wish to become a diplomatist, in which character great wealth would be necessary to his influence and splendour.

His ardour for travelling was now greater than ever and as he had just come into the entire possession of his fortune, and, besides his regular revenue, had between two and three thousand zecchins in advance, there was nothing to oppose his wishes. Hence in May 1769 he again bade Turin farewell, and took the road to Vienna. His faithful servant Elia still accompanied him, and relieved him of every care but that of expressing his wishes. The Essays of Montaigne contributed to relieve the fatigue of the way, and he would have said nothing but good of the old author, had not his frequent Latin quotations shamed him into the discovery of his ignorance.

At Vienna the ambassador from Turin offered to introduce him to Metastasio, at whose house he was accustomed to pass the evening in company with the literary men whom the poet assembled for conversation and for the perusal of the Latin and Greek classics. The ambassador affectionately sought to awaken in Alfieri a thirst for literature by inviting him to join this erudite party. "But besides being retired by nature," says Alfieri, "I was wholly ingulphed in French, and despised every Italian book and author. That assemblage, therefore, of literary men with their classics was in my eyes but a multitude of fastidious pedants." To this cause of his disinclination to join the party at Metastasio's, he adds another. "I had seen Metastasio," says he, "in the imperial gardens at Schoenbrunn. He was making the customary genuflexions to Maria Teresa, with a face so servilely smooth and adulatory, that, Plutarchising like a youth, and exaggerating truth in the abstract, I could never consent to contract either friendship or familiarity with him. His was a muse hired or sold to that despotic authority, which I so thoroughly abhorred."

It was with similar feelings that he entered the dominions of Frederick the Great. On seeing some of his troops, "I felt," says he, "my horror doubled and trebled for that infamous military art, most infamous, and the only foundation of arbitrary power, which is always the necessary fruit of so many thousands of paid satellites. I was presented to the king. I could perceive in myself no sign of wonder or veneration, but those rather of indignation and anger,—emotions which were every day increased and strengthened at the sight of the many and various things which were not as they ought to have been, and which, being false, usurp the form and the reputation of what is true. Count Finch, the minister by whom I was presented, asked me, as I was in the service of my sovereign, why I had not worn my uniform that day? 'Because,' I replied, 'there are already too many uniforms here.' The king addressed to me the four customary words; I observed him profoundly, fixing my eyes respectfully on his, and I thanked Heaven for not having destined me to be born his slave."

From Prussia, Alfieri proceeded to Copenhagen, whence he intended to travel rapidly to St. Petersburg.

Sweden, which he reached towards the end of March, reminded him of Ossian, and he contemplated, with a mixed feeling of awe and delight, its vast lakes, and dark, wooded precipices. The people and the character of the government were not less objects of his admiration, and had he been capable of serious application, he would have examined the latter with profound interest; but his want of a proper preparation for such investigations incapacitated him from judging of things, except from the first general impressions which they made on

his mind ; and thus he confesses, that he had no idea of the corrupt state of the nobility, or of the bad condition of the poor in Sweden, a knowledge of which would have considerably changed his opinion as to the value of the constitution.

He was happy and amused at Stockholm, but it was equal to him whether a country afforded him satisfaction or only excited his indignation or disgust. To return was impossible, and early in May, therefore, he set out for St. Petersburg. His voyage across the Gulf of Bothnia, choked with ice, was fatiguing and perilous, but it kept his spirits in agitation, and therefore gratified him. Every scene, indeed, which he witnessed in these northern regions gave him pleasure. "They were calculated," he observes, "to awaken fantastic, melancholy, and grand images in the mind by a certain vast, indefinable silence which reigns in the atmosphere, making us feel as if we were out of the world."

The constant glaring of the aurora borealis, on which he gazed through the night, confused his head, and after a short time he could tell neither the hour of the day nor the day of the week, and in this state of weariness he entered the territories of Catherine II. St. Petersburg disappointed him, and so violent was his contempt for the inhabitants and the empress, that during a stay of seven weeks, he neither sought acquaintances, nor took any interest in the objects presented to his notice. He returned, therefore, to Berlin, little satisfied with what he had witnessed in Russia, and again passing through Germany and Holland, once more set his foot on English ground.

During this visit to England he entered into all the fashionable amusements of the metropolis ; fought a duel ; was wounded, and, on his recovery, returned to

France. Paris pleased him no better than at first. He might have become acquainted with Rousseau, but he declined the introduction, and says, "I held Rousseau in the highest estimation, and that more for his pure and admirable character, and for his lofty and independent conduct, than for his writings. Of these I had read but few, and what I had read, had wearied me by their affectations. But whatever my esteem for him, since I was neither very curious, nor very tolerant, but as haughty and inflexible as he could be, I felt no wish to avail myself of the proposed interview. Had he, in some strange, whimsical mood, offered me even half an affront, I should have returned it with ten; for I have always, by the instinct of an impetuous nature, repaid with usury both good and evil."

About the middle of August, he left Paris for Spain, but before his departure he purchased a set of the principal Italian classics, in thirty-six volumes, which thenceforth became the inseparable companions of his travels. It was not, however, till two years after this that he began to enjoy his purchase. He bought them, he says, rather to have than to read them; for with the exception of Metastasio, he found it difficult to understand the language of an Italian author; but the work subsequently proved of invaluable use to him, for it made him acquainted with the six great luminaries of his country, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, Boccaccio, and Machiavelli.

The first place at which he remained for any length of time was Barcelona, where he bought two magnificent Spanish horses, of which he speaks with enthusiastic pleasure. He also began to study the language, and, resuming his route, proceeded to Madrid by way of Saragossa. In describing this journey, he again regrets, that

he was unable to express his thoughts in verse; the solitary wastes, through which he slowly travelled, and the wild, romantic character of the scenery giving birth to feelings which it only required a mastery over expression to become true and living poetry. His reflection on this circumstance is curious. "Neither possessing a language, nor dreaming that I should or could ever write anything, either in verse or prose, I contented myself with ruminating on my thoughts; sometimes complaining, I knew not why, and at others laughing without just as little reason: — two things, which, if not followed by writing, are counted madness, — and they are madness; but if they appear in writing, they are called poetry, — and they are poetry."

He knew no one at Madrid but a young watchmaker whom he had seen in Holland; and thus he led, he says, more the life of a bear than of a man. This want of society contributed also to increase his natural disposition to melancholy, and the violence of his temper, which the following incident shows us, neither experience nor philosophy as yet assisted him to subdue. It was the custom before retiring to bed to have his hair, a great source of trouble to men of fashion in those days than at present, put in order by Elia. On the occasion in question the young watchmaker, a man of some talent and knowledge of the world, had been spending the evening with him; and they were still conversing together while the servant was proceeding with his usual task. In the course of the process the unfortunate domestic happened to twitch a stray lock rather harder than was agreeable, on which the infuriated master sprang from his seat, and seizing a candlestick from the table, struck him a violent blow on the right temple. The blood gushed copiously forth, and Alfieri's guest, thinking that

he was suddenly taken delirious, instantly endeavoured to secure him. Elia, at the same moment, put himself in a position to revenge the injury, and as his master had armed himself with a sword that stood in the room, the death of one of the parties seemed inevitable. The watchmaker had sufficient to do to prevent this from becoming the fatal consequence of his friend's fury. Elia was a large and very powerful man, and was not inferior to his master in resolution. Happily the domestics of the house were alarmed by the noise of the fray, and, rushing into the apartment, they succeeded by main force in separating the combatants.

It required but a short time to convince Alfieri of his error. Profoundly abashed and humiliated, he told Elia, to whom he was greatly attached, that he ought to have used his strength, and beaten him to death. Having seen the wound dressed, and the house restored to order, he went to bed. As he lay down, he called to Elia, whose chamber was adjoining, that he had left his door open, and that he might kill him before the morning if he chose, for he deserved it. "But Elia," says he, "was not less a hero than myself, and the only vengeance he took was to preserve two little phials filled with the blood which had spouted from the wound, and often to show them to me, which he continued to do for many years. This reciprocal mixture of fierceness and generosity on both our parts can hardly be understood by those who are unacquainted with the manners and customs of us Piedmontese." His concluding observation on this affair is not less characteristic of his disposition, so singularly compounded of pride and the love of freedom, generosity, and passion. "I have never beaten any one who served me," says he, "except as I should have done it to an equal, and never with a stick, or anything but my fist,

or my chair, or something which fell immediately in my hand, as boys are accustomed to arm themselves when provoked. On the very few occasions also that this happened, I should always have praised and esteemed the servants who had saluted me again with a beating, since I never thought of striking a servant in my character as master, but as one man quarrelling with another man.

Alfieri left Madrid in December, having refused to go to court, from some dislike of the Sardinian minister who had arrived in Spain about the same time as himself. He proceeded to Lisbon, and, during his residence there of five weeks, became acquainted with the Abate Tommaso di Caluso, younger brother of the ambassador from Turin. This circumstance produced a memorable change in the mind of our poet. The amiable manners of the abate, and his elegant conversation, rendered his society delightful even to the fastidious Alfieri, who neglected every species of public amusement to pass his evenings at his house. Another characteristic of the Abate's disposition, and which was especially agreeable to his new acquaintance, was the mildness and forbearance with which he conversed with those far inferior to himself in knowledge and ability. "It was on one of those most sweet evenings," says Alfieri, "that I experienced in the deepest recesses of my mind and heart a genuine impulse from Phœbus—an enthusiastic ravishment for the art of poetry. It was, however, but a short-lived flame, and it lay buried under the ashes for many years." He then relates the circumstance which gave birth to this sudden fervour. "The most excellent and complaisant abate was reading to me that magnificent 'Ode to Fortune,' by Guidi, a poet of whom I had not till then ever heard the name. Some stanzas of that canzone, especially the beautiful one on Pompey, transported me to such a

degree, that the good abate persuaded himself, and told me, that I was born to make verses, and that if I studied I should write excellent poetry: but that momentary excitement having passed away, I found all the faculties of my mind so rusted, that I did not believe such a thing at all possible." Notwithstanding the discouraging tone of the last sentence, it is easy to discover, from the succeeding pages of the confessions, that he was thenceforth bent upon seeking intellectual improvement, and that he now began to set a due value upon the productions of his countrymen.

In the May of 1772 he again arrived in his native town, after an absence of three years. His health had suffered considerably from over-exertion in his journey on horseback through Spain. He therefore resolved to pass some time in tranquillity, and, with this intention, took a magnificent house under the Piazza di S. Carlo, and furnished it in a style of extraordinary splendour.* All his old and favourite associates of the academy flocked around him, and a new academy was formed, of which the sole purpose was to promote friendship and enjoyment. The "August sessions" of this society were held at the house of Alfieri, because it was more spacious and elegant than those belonging to the rest of the company. By one of the rules of the institution, the members were to contribute whatever specimen of wit or knowledge they could produce for the amusement of the society, on certain evenings; and for this purpose papers were written on every variety of topics, and deposited in a chest, of which the president, chosen weekly, kept the key. "These papers," says Alfieri, "were all written, to our misfortune, and mine especially, I will not say in the French

* Epoca Terza, Cap. XIII.

language, but in French words." He furnished a full proportion of the essays himself, and obtained great applause from his companions, especially for a scene in which he described a universal judgment, representing the Deity as demanding of all the various animals an account of themselves. Portraits of well-known characters in Turin were introduced into this piece, and greatly admired for their spirit and fidelity.

The success of this satiric attempt gave birth to wishes and hopes, at the same time, that he might one day write something which should deserve to live. Satire at first seemed to him the species of composition best fitted to his talents; but, after reflecting on the subject, he rejected this idea, convinced that satire is but too frequently the product of mere private malignity, and that, in the greater number of instances, it can acquire only a momentary popularity. Another love-fit intervened to disturb these literary aspirations. So violent and overwhelming was the attack, that it made him forget, for a time, not only his books, his companions, and his academy, but even, as he terms them, "his adorable horses." Thus it continued till the month of February 1775, when he was assailed by a dangerous malady, which the physicians, finding it difficult to resist its progress, said he must have invented purposely for himself.

The recovery of his health was attended with that of his prudence and regard for literature. The first step he took was to free himself from the yoke imposed by his subjection to martial law. This certainly lay lightly enough on his shoulders. Of the eight years during which he had borne his sovereign's commission, he had spent four out of the country, and had scarcely been seen in the regiment five times while at Turin. It was no

military hardship, therefore, which occasioned his disgust, but his acknowledged hatred of being, even in appearance, an instrument of arbitrary power. He applied to the colonel for permission to retire on the plea of ill health. The colonel begged him to consider what he was doing before taking such a step; and, to act with proper politeness, he pretended to reflect on the subject a fortnight longer, at the end of which time, as he declared that his wish remained unaltered, he was allowed to resign.

He had not, however, ceased to love, and the object of his affections falling dangerously sick in the January of 1774, he passed both night and day in attendance at her bed-side. It was to while away the weary hours thus spent, for conversation was forbidden the sick lady, that he attempted his first dramatic sketch, the "Cleopatra," without knowing, he says, what he intended to make, whether a tragedy or comedy, or whether it was to be in one, five, or ten acts. But some dialogues were speedily composed, and they exhibited sufficient feeling to induce him to believe that his rude and hasty attempt was superior to a new tragedy on the same subject by the Cardinal Delfino. As soon, however, as it was finished, he became indifferent as to its fate, and it lay buried under the cushion of his mistress's couch for nearly a year, when, on determining to free himself from her trammels, he again turned his thoughts to literature, wrote a sonnet on his recovery from love, made himself a close prisoner in his house that he might not be again ensnared, and, finally, on re-examining the cardinal's tragedy above mentioned, resolved to make the experiment of extending his fragment, and employing it as a medium for displaying the affections to which he was himself a victim. In order that nothing might induce him to leave home, he had

recourse to the singular expedient of making Elia bind him fast to his chair. When his friends came to see him, he covered the bandage with his dressing-gown, and induced them to suppose, by his studious air, that he had no stronger necessity to keep his seat than extreme anxiety not to dissipate his thoughts. Reading, however, became so agreeable to him, that Elia in a little time was able to trust to his remaining at home without binding him. About the same time also he wrote a poem against love, which he recited in the character of Apollo at a masquerade, submitting, he observes, to that exposure, that he might have an additional reason studiously to avoid falling again into the snares from which he had so lately escaped.

The tragedy, in the meantime, was brought to a conclusion. He immediately sent a portion of it to his friend Father Pacianda, a man of prudence and good taste, who read it with attention, and returned it with the most incorrect passages carefully noted. This but inflamed Alfieri's desire of producing something more worthy of approbation, and he lost no time in thoroughly revising the different scenes of his drama, which was performed at Turin, June 16, 1775. The tragedy was followed by a farce, to which he gave the title of "The Poets," and though he makes merry with both these productions, he observes, that they were not the follies of a fool, but had here and there sparkles of wit and poetry. Both the play and farce were received with approbation, and performed two successive evenings. This unexpected success operated in different ways on the mind of the author. Its first effect was to make him conscious of powers not yet properly developed,—the second effect was to make him resolve on seeking eminence as a dramatist, whatever the difficulties in his way.

It was with these feelings that he commenced what he terms the fourth epoch of his life, and which is dated from the year 1775. He had, in reality, by this time, grown up into a poet of vast power and genius, for the melancholy dreamings, the crowd of thoughts that possessed his mind in the solitudes whether of the north or the south; the principles which always animated his heart with the love of liberty; the wild feeling which kept him waking as he travelled, night after night, under the glare of the northern meteors; the joy which animated him while passing through the pastoral villages of England, and, above all, his admiration, even from infancy, of whatever was beautiful, — these, the genuine attributes of the poetic nature, had been all gathering strength in Alfieri's soul for many years past; and at the period of which we are now speaking they were matured, and the father of Italian tragedy was like an eagle full-winged for a flight across the ocean, but waiting for the impulse of the proper season to send it from its nest.

Alfieri gives an account of the capital with which he began life as a dramatist, and says, that it consisted of a resolute, obstinate, and indomitable spirit*; of a heart full of, and abounding in, every species of affection, among which appeared, mixed in strange confusion, love and all its furies, and a fierce, deep-seated rage against, and abhorrence of, every kind of tyranny. To which simple instincts of nature was added a weak and uncertain recollection of various French tragedies, seen at the theatre many years before.

But many as were the advantages Alfieri possessed as a poetical being, and one whose language would naturally

* Epoca Quarta, Cap. I.

be poetry as soon as he had learned its elements, he was almost wholly destitute of those acquirements by which he was to make his conceptions wear forms palpable and intelligible to the world. He knew nothing of the theoretical rules of his art ; he had read scarcely any of the poets ; he was almost as ignorant as a child of the principles of grammar, and, to crown the whole, was very imperfectly acquainted with any better language than Piedmontese. But he had vowed to use all the strength allowed him to obtain the object of his wishes, and he instantly put his resolution to the proof by beginning the study of grammar. He also translated into Italian two tragedies, "Il Filippo" and "Il Polinice," which he had some time before written in French prose. Strange to say, such was the difficulty which he found in managing his own thoughts, that nobody recognised the Italian as an intended version of the French. To these exercises he added the careful study of Dante, Tasso, Ariosto and Petrarch. Dante and Petrarch, however, were at first too difficult to afford him pleasure in the perusal, and the reading even of Tasso wearied him at first more than composition. But the translation of Ossian by Cesarotti captivated him by the grandeur of the blank verse, and he continually asked both himself and his friends how it happened, that the language which in Dante, in the translations of Cesarotti, and other works, appeared so sublime and energetic, was so weak and unimpressive in the mouths of those who had attempted to write tragedies ?

Having employed himself for some months in these Italian studies, he determined to refresh his knowledge of Latin, and for that purpose engaged a tutor, with whom he read the tragedies of Seneca, and Latin translations of the Greek tragedians, and even condescended

to be put into Phædrus again. Soon, however, returning to the ardent study of Italian, he resolved, as the surest and speediest method of acquiring its most perfect idioms, to take up his abode in Tuscany. During his stay at Pisa, where he spent six or seven weeks, he formed the plan of the tragedy of "Antigone," and found himself so rapidly improving in pure Italian, that he was able to develop the plot in good, respectable prose. He then versified the "Polinice" and the "Filippo," and on his reading them to some of the literary men of the place, obtained much greater praise than he expected, or could be made to believe he deserved. His next effort was a literal translation of Horace's "Art of Poetry," which he undertook for the sake of fixing it in his mind. At Florence he constantly conversed with the best speakers, and committed to memory long passages of the poets.

After a residence of several weeks in the Tuscan capital, he returned to Turin, where, however, he had remained but a short time when he again found it necessary to leave that city, and take up his residence at Siena, it being in Tuscany alone that he could pursue the favourite object of his studies with satisfactory success. Machiavelli, whose works had been recommended to him long before, now became his constant companion, as was also Sallust. Full of enthusiastic admiration for the opinions of these authors, he sat down to the composition of the "Tirannide," of which work he speaks with respect in his latest years, not for any propriety or elegance in its style, but for its sentiments. Various tragedies, as the "Congiura de' Pazzi," the "Orestes," and "Virginia," with some others, were all in progress or under correction at the same period; and our author found himself as deeply involved in literary cares as if he had been a scholar from his infancy.

From Siena he went, at the end of about five months to Florence, where he was now introduced to the Countess of Albany, destined to exercise so powerful an influence over his feelings during the remainder of his life. When this lady left Florence to take up her abode in a convent at Rome, his plans were, for a time, again unsettled. But he had been engaged in effecting an arrangement which, when accomplished, consoled him by the feeling, that he was at liberty to change his own residence as often and as capriciously as he pleased. His hatred of constraint, and of arbitrary power, has been frequently mentioned, but this sentiment grew every day stronger, and when he remembered that, having become an author, he could not print his books either in Turin, or any other city, without the special permission of his sovereign; that he was subject to punishment if he disobeyed this law, and that he could not even leave the circumscribed limits of his country without particular leave from the Government, he made the magnanimous resolve of giving up all the estates, the possession of which entailed upon him this degrading vassalage. Immediately on coming to this determination, he wrote to his sister and her husband on the subject, and desired them, as the former was the next heir, to expedite the business as speedily as possible. The plan on which he wished to proceed was, that his sister should allow him an annual pension, which, with some other trifling property, would leave him master of about half the income he at present possessed. After a long and troublesome correspondence, during which Alfieri saw reason to fear that he might have reduced himself to beggary by his proceedings, the affair was concluded to his satisfaction, and having sold off his plate and furniture, and even his favourite horses, he began leading a life of the most

severe economy. It is amusing to trace the various thoughts which passed through his mind, when in the worst state of doubt respecting the issue of his negotiation. The only business of which he supposed himself capable was that of a horse-breaker. Of this, he says, he considered himself to be perfectly master. "It also seemed to me," he continues, "to be sufficiently consistent with that of a poet, it being much easier to write a tragedy in a stable than at a court."

Soon after the departure of the countess for Rome, he returned to Siena, trusting that the journey and change of scene might restore his tranquillity. But it did not, and he hastened to Rome, where he had only the sad satisfaction of conversing with the countess for some minutes through a grate. After staying, therefore, but a few days, he proceeded to Naples, where, at the end of five or six weeks, he learnt that the countess had obtained the Pope's consent to her living separate from her husband, and in freedom. This intelligence again took him to Rome, where he determined to establish his residence, and pursue his literary occupations with more industry than ever.

He had proposed to himself, at an early period of his career, to limit the number of his intended tragedies to twelve, and at the beginning of the year 1782 he found his task completed, except as he intended to correct and re-correct what were written. In doing this he took the dramas in hand one after the other, according to the order in which they had been composed. But in the February of the same year, the "*Merope of Maffei*" attracting his notice, he was enraged at discovering how miserable a production had obtained the reputation, and a reputation which could not be refused it, of having excelled all other Italian tragedies that had as yet appeared. With

this feeling he sat down to compose one on the same subject as Maffei's, and such was the pleasure which took in the completion of new and sudden designs, that they cost him, he observes, less time and less fatigue than any of the rest. Towards the end of the year he had the satisfaction also of seeing his "Antigone" performed at a private theatre before an audience composed of the first people in Rome.* It was received with the highest applause, and, thus encouraged, at the beginning of 1775 he sent four of his tragedies to press.

Finding that his constant visits to the countess had given rise to scandal, he took the magnanimous resolution of leaving Rome for some time, and with a heavy heart set out on a long tour, in the course of which he visited Parini at Milan, and became closely attached to this warm-hearted man and excellent writer. He then proceeded to Siena, where six more of his tragedies were printed; but in seeing them through the press he suffered a torment, from his want of practice in correcting and revising proofs, as intolerable as it was new and strange.

It is not a little amusing to find that, amid all other feelings, his fondness for horses continued unabated, and almost supreme. Wanting at this time some amusement which might distract his mind from too much thought, he resolved upon making a journey to England, for the sole purpose of purchasing a stud. Hither he accordingly came, and buying no less than fourteen of his favourite animals, he spent four months in London, occupying his whole time in the luxurious enjoyment of fine riding, and in writing letters to his friends.

With his fourteen horses, which, being young and

* Epoca Quarta, Cap. X.

spirited, were by no means a slight charge, he passed through France to his native city of Turin, where he was received by the king with unexpected kindness. After remaining there a few days he again hastened to Siena, and thence into Germany. The journey excited his poetic vigour, and though he had resolved never to write another tragedy, he commenced three new ones, the "Agide," "Sofonisba," and "Mirra."

Alfieri's mode of spending his time was now more unsettled than ever, and having been continually changing his residence from one place to another, as the whim of the moment, or the news he received of the countess dictated, he in 1787 fixed his residence in Paris, where he remained for three years, anxiously watching the printing of his tragedies in six volumes by Didot. Great were his apprehensions that all his labour might be frustrated by some sudden effect of the popular fury. Didot could only with extreme difficulty keep any of his men at work; and the alarm of the countess increasing every day, Alfieri was obliged to see her safe to England. But this country had not the attractions for her which she had imagined it to possess from the eloquent eulogiums of Alfieri. They therefore shortly returned to Paris, and witnessed the terrible scenes which took place in that capital on the eventful tenth of August, 1792.

With great difficulty they succeeded in obtaining passports to quit the country; and it was only by Alfieri's taking the wise precaution of setting out two days before he had mentioned, and leaving his books, his horses, and other effects behind, that they effected their escape. On the third of November they arrived in Florence, where our poet, having by this time fully satisfied his love of wandering, resolved to spend the remainder of his days in tranquillity. He was now

forty-six years of age, a period of life at which few think of commencing, from the very elements, any new and difficult species of study. But Alfieri would refuse labour, by undergoing which he might add either grace or strength to that intellect, in the improvement and enlarging of which he felt that the true nobility of his being consisted. After endeavouring, therefore, to discover the beauties of the Greek poets in literal translations, and becoming convinced that the image reflected through such a medium must be a very incorrect or imperfect one, he determined, about two years after, that is in 1796, to begin the study of Greek; and so ardently did he apply himself, that in a short time he was able to read almost any author in the language.

Fully occupied with these and other objects of the same kind, he lived in great comfort and contentedness, seeing no reason to dread any interruption to his felicity till the progress of the French arms made him tremble for the safety of Florence. Retreating to a villa in the neighbourhood, he continued studying and composing with the same indefatigable energy as before, till Florence was evacuated by the invaders, when he returned to his former residence. But in October 1800, the French once more occupied the city. The general of the army politely sent to request that he would visit him, expressing his desire to do honour to a man of whom fame spoke so highly. To this Alfieri replied, that, if he commanded him on the strength of his authority to attend him, he would obey; but that, if he merely invited him as an individual, he must excuse his absence.

In the September of this year he was seized with an irresistible desire to write comedies*; and he accord-

* Epoca Quarta, Cap. XXIX.

ingly commenced, and in a short time had drawn out a sketch of six, of which four, he says, were representative of the manners of the age, one fantastic, and another light and farcical. These comedies he put into verse, and laboured so hard at the undertaking, and the constant study of Greek, making literal translations into Latin from the tragedians, from Pindar and Homer, that he greatly injured his health, which now began to show symptoms of rapid decline. Such, however, was his satisfaction at his triumphant pursuit of Greek literature for the last seven years, that, in a half serious and half comic humour, he invented a collar, which was to be worn as the ensign of a new species of chivalry, designated the Homeric Order.

With this little incident, which shows how easily the mind of a great man may be amused, even after it has long learned to despise the follies of the world, Alfieri closes his confessions. The date of the concluding paragraph is May 14th, 1803 ; and on the 18th of October in the same year, this celebrated writer terminated his career.* From a letter of his friend, the Abate di Caluso, to whom he was strongly attached, we learn that his death was occasioned by gout in the stomach, to which his frame, exhausted by over-study, offered no resistance. He continued, even to the last few days of his life, intent on the correction of his works, his memory and all the other faculties of his mind remaining unimpaired to the moment of his death. The countess attended him with care and affection throughout his illness. Shortly before his decease he recited to her, as she sat by his bed-side, several verses from a translation of Hesiod, and no apprehension was entertained of immediate danger. She

* Lettera del Signor Abate di Caluso alla preclarissima Signora Contessa d'Albany.

happened to be out of the room when death approached; but immediately returning, Alfieri called her to him, saying, "Clasp my hand, dear friend, I am dying," and almost instantly expired. His burial took place in the church of Santa Croce, where were already deposited the remains of Machiavelli and Michael Angelo. The Countess of Albany soon after raised an elegant monument to his memory, the work of the great Canova.

The character of Alfieri has been already sufficiently displayed. It exhibited many contradictions. Frankness, generosity, freedom of thought, and the love of truth must have but an uncertain hold of the heart that so easily practises all the opposite vices to gain some object of unhallowed desire. But there was a grandeur in his love of independence, which we cannot contemplate without a glow of admiration; while the deep melancholy with which he was habitually affected, and which led him to muse so often "in lone cathedral aisles," or exposed him to an afflicting violence of passion, added to this admiration of his free spirit a feeling of pity; and the sublime and retiring poet is presented to our imagination as one of the men whom, of all others, we should choose to point out as a type or embodied image of his own dramas.

Besides his tragedies, Alfieri wrote a variety of minor poems, several satires, a melo-tragedy, entitled "The Death of Abel," the prose treatises "Della Tirannide," and "Il Principe e le Lettere," both directed against arbitrary power; a volume to which he gave the name of "Misogallo," from the heterogeneous character of its contents; the comedies above mentioned, and several translations from the classics. These numerous works exhibit very different degrees of merit. His comedies and most of his miscellanea are considered wholly un-

worthy of his name. Only a few of his satires are exempted from the same censure; but his prose works are celebrated for the strong and unaffected language in which they are written. Of his translations, that of Sallust is esteemed one of the best versions that exist of any author, or in any language; while that which he executed of Virgil, though three times attempted, is equally poor and spiritless. But when it is considered at what a comparatively late period Alfieri commenced these labours, how highly must we estimate the natural power and moral strength of his intellect, thus original, and thus resolute and laborious !

MELCHIOR CESAROTTI.

THE celebrity of Melchior Cesarotti is established on a firmer basis than that of the generality of writers, he equals in intellectual power. But extensive learning, none of which was left unemployed, and the union of his name with that of Homer and of Ossian, may be regarded as the means by which he rose to a rank which few have attained without greater genius.

This distinguished writer was born at Padua on the 15th of May, 1730.* His family was of noble rank, but poor. Destined from childhood to the ecclesiastical profession, Melchior commenced his studies, at a very early period, in the university of his native town. The passion for learning which characterised him throughout his life, was displayed in his boyhood, and in a manner which his friends seem not to have expected. It was the custom of his parents, during the autumn vacations, to place him under the care of his uncle, a brother of the Franciscan monastery of Sant' Antonio. Whether this was intended for his pleasure or his profit does not appear; but the good monk was not always in a humour

* Memorie intorno alla Vita ed agli Studj dell' Ab. Cesarotti dall' Ab. G. Barbieri; Vita di Cesarotti, Opere Scelte, Milan; and "Opere," &c., printed at Florence and Pisa in forty volumes.

to bear with the sportive disposition of his nephew, and on these occasions he commonly contrived to lock him up, a close prisoner, in the convent library. The natural curiosity of youth, and the absence of all other sources of amusement, would have led a much duller lad than Melchior to rummage the book-shelves; but he had an intuitive love of learning, and the monk soon found that he had no need to carry away the key when he shut him into the library. Cesarotti was fond of telling this story to his friends, and always spoke with the liveliest affection of his uncle; who, it appears, supplied by his care the deficiencies of Melchior's father—a man of indolent and expensive habits, who forgot in self-indulgence the claims of his family.

Having completed the preliminary portion of his education, and with a mind already stored with much miscellaneous knowledge, he commenced the study of philosophy under Billesimo, who was at that time in the zenith of his fame. But whatever might be the extent of his learning, neither his method nor his taste was such as to render his lessons attractive to a youth of Cesarotti's character; and it was only by the strong resistance which his ambition offered to his inclination, that the young poet was enabled to keep at the head of his fellow-students.

The course of education pursued at the University of Padua next led him to mathematics, but he made little progress in that science; and it was only on his becoming acquainted with Charron's "Book of Wisdom" that his mind resumed its usual activity. Soon after this, he enjoyed the still greater advantage of a personal acquaintance with Giuseppe Toaldo, a man whose vast scientific acquirements did not prevent him from culti-

vating the friendship of those whose minds were devoted to learning of a lighter class.

The name of Toaldo is held at Padua, and with reason in the highest estimation. He was born in the year 1719, at Pianezza, a little village near Vincenza, and was sent to Padua at the proper age to study theology. But he had not been long there before he was attracted to the pursuit of natural philosophy; and his subsequent appointment to the office of arch-priest in a neighbouring church, enabled him to follow his inclination without neglecting his more serious employments. He had already, at the period of his advancement, prepared for the press an edition of the works of Galileo, with a preface and notes, but he had to contend with the bigotry of three censors, before permission was given him to publish the celebrated dialogues of his author on the system of the world. In the year 1762, he had the satisfaction of being chosen professor of physical geography and astronomy in the University of Padua. Ever attentive to the duties of his office, he projected the establishment of an observatory, and after a long struggle with numerous opponents, succeeded in carrying his wishes into effect.* His various works on natural science attest the power as well as the activity of his mind; and though Cesarotti had himself made so little progress in this department of learning, it is easy to conceive that he might hold in profound reverence a man who could unite enthusiasm for the abstrusest studies with an admiration of the most elegant. The manner in which he always spoke of him in after years proves how great an influence he must have exercised over his mind. In the inscription on the monument

* *Biographie Universelle*, art. Toaldo.

which he raised to his memory in the villa Selvaggiano, he calls him by the endearing titles of friend and father, as well as master. "My Socrates" was also another appellation which he commonly applied to him; and in a letter written to one of his acquaintances, soon after Toaldo's death, he says, "I thank you from my heart for the sympathy you express at my loss of Toaldo. I have lost, indeed, the earliest of my friends, the true father of my mind, the only philosopher among us in these times of universal darkness." *

After having expended a short period in the study of jurisprudence and theology, Cesarotti finally devoted himself to the cultivation of general literature, and was chosen professor of rhetoric.† Thus, placed in a situation in which he was sure of making his voice heard among the learned men of his country, he began to express his bold, and, at that time, almost wholly novel doubts respecting the propriety of the close imitation of the ancients, which infected and lowered the style of his erudite contemporaries. In conformity with this feeling on the subject of the classics, he resolved, it is said, from that time, never to separate criticism from philosophy and the natural rules of taste, and to oppose, with all his power, the longer continuance of those pedantic rules which had been hitherto followed in the education of youth.‡ His opinions on this matter are found explained, with considerable humour, in a dialogue written at the period of which we are speaking, entitled "Homines Histrones," and which forms part of his Latin Miscellanies.§

The honourable station to which he had been promoted in the university, excited him to make the most vigorous

* Opere, vol. xl. p. 29.

† Vita, ed Milan.

‡ Memorie di Barbieri.

§ Opere, vol. xxxi. p. 291.

efforts in the farther improvement of his own mind. Amid the treasures of the Biblioteca Volpiana, he employed all the hours in which he was not engaged with his professional duties; and it was from the mass of learning which he thereby accumulated, that he drew, in after years, the materials of his multifarious productions. His industry was unceasing. Not contented with the perusal of the works which attracted his attention, he submitted to the labour of making copious extracts from them with his own hand; and when he found himself unable to multiply these transcripts so rapidly as he wished, he called in the aid of his pupils, and, by their means, speedily filled his cases with abridgments of all the most useful authors.

In the year 1754 he appeared for the first time before the public in the character of a translator, and presented it with a version of the "Prometheus" of Æschylus. This work was undertaken by the persuasion of one of his acquaintances, Paolo Brazolo, a man as distinguished for his profound knowledge of Greek literature, as Cesarotti's other friend, Giuseppe Toaldo, was for his science. Brazolo himself was a translator, and had such an enthusiastic admiration of Homer, that he had twice rendered the Iliad into Italian; but, too thoroughly possessed by the inimitable grandeur of the original to be satisfied with Homer in any other language than Greek, he had each time committed the result of his laborious undertaking to the flames.

Cesarotti's version of the "Prometheus" gave no promise, it is said, of his future celebrity as a translator: it was weak and prosaic; and he was himself sufficiently sensible of its utter want of merit not to allow it a place in the general edition of his works. He next undertook the translation of Voltaire's "Mahomet," and "Death of

Cæsar," to which he added that of the "Semiramide." These were executed in a somewhat better style than the "Prometheus;" but, according to the judgment of those of his countrymen who are best qualified to decide on their merits, they possess no great claim to consideration. Alfieri was not a little amused when, several years after, on sending a volume of his own tragedies to our author, and requesting him to point out some model of tragic verse, he received an answer from him, in which it was indicated, that he could find no better example than his "Prometheus." "It is not necessary that I should make any observation on this circumstance," says Alfieri; "everybody can form his own judgment, and compare Cesarotti's verses with mine: they may also compare his versification in Ossian, and see if it appear to proceed from the same manufacture. But this fact will serve to prove what miserable creatures all men, and especially we authors, are, who have always in our hands paper and pen to describe others, but have never a mirror in which to observe and form a judgment of ourselves." *

That Cesarotti did not succeed better in his translation of Voltaire's tragedies, is not to be attributed to any want of enthusiasm for his author. "Zaire," which he did not attempt to render into Italian, is said to have so deeply affected him, that he read it four times, constantly bathed in tears, and still unable to satiate himself with its beauties. The admiration of his friend and eulogist, Barbieri, for this celebrated tragedy, appears to be not less than Cesarotti's. "He hereby gave," says that writer, in the memoir to which we owe the above anecdote, "a great lesson to those who believe themselves predestinated by the muses to the noble ministry of

* Vita, Epoca Quarta, Cap. XV.

poetry. Let them read 'Zaire : ' if they be not melted into tears, if they be not impelled to read it again and again, either the whole or in part, if the subject do not haunt them day and night, at home and abroad, alone and with others, let them cease to flatter themselves—let them bid adieu to poetry.”*

But in whatever light the early productions of Cessrotti may now be considered, they had the effect of making him known to several persons of distinction. His pupils performed the tragedies, which were not yet published, in the theatre of the university, with considerable applause ; and this, together with the excellent manner in which he had attended to the duties of his professorship, rendered him popular far beyond the limits of his own academy. The consequence was, an invitation from an illustrious and noble family at Venice, the younger branches of which required his assistance as a private preceptor. There was something too flattering in this proposal for the young philosopher to be able to reject it ; and he bade farewell to his beloved Padua, and the library of Volpi.

Soon after arriving at Venice, he published his translations from Voltaire, and some pieces in prose. These were followed by his poems entitled “La Purità,” “Il Cinto d’ Imeneo,” and “Il Genio dell’ Adria,” together with some of an amatory character, which his more ardent admirers compare to those of Petrarch. That he was, however, at this time in some danger of losing a portion of his studious gravity, appears from a letter written by him in January 1761 to his friend Toaldo, in which he repels the suspicions which had induced the astronomer to send him an epistle full of warnings.

* *Memorie, Opere*, vol. xl. p. 54.

"Nothing," he says, "can be more out of place than your reproaches and advice. I am not in any way running wild."*

It is not easy to say what were the precise subjects of Toaldo's remonstrances; but it is not difficult to conceive, that a young man of Cesarotti's poetical temperament, finding himself suddenly surrounded by all the attractions of a fascinating city like Venice, might often wear a gayer look than as a professor amid his pupils at Padua.

Among his Venetian acquaintances were several persons of high distinction in the state, and others much celebrated for their literary acquirements; but in the year 1762, he became acquainted with Mr. Sackville, a circumstance to which he owed, more than to any other event in his life, the establishment of his reputation as an author. The attention of the literary world in England was at that period wholly occupied with the poems of Ossian. Mr. Sackville had just received a copy from this country, and being among the warmest partisans of the Celtic bard, he took the poem to Cesarotti, who was unacquainted with English, and amused himself by translating to him several passages of striking beauty and sublimity. Nothing could exceed the delight with which he was listened to by our author. Nor is it surprising that such was the effect on Cesarotti's mind. An ardent opponent of the classical school of poetry, he found in Fingal the boldness and splendour of imagery, in which the later productions of his own country were so singularly deficient. The discovery, consequently, of the existence of such poetry as that of the northern hero, was scarcely less grateful to him than it would have

* Opere, vol. xxxv. p. 8.

been to Macpherson had he really found it among the wilds. His imagination, his taste, his love of theory, and, above all, his ambition, were each interested in the display of the new poetic world; and but a short time elapsed before he formed the bold determination of tuning the silver harp of Italy to a key in which it had never yet been struck.

With the assistance of his friend Sackville, he was enabled to carry his project into execution; and having translated, with trifling exceptions, all that Macpherson had at the time published, he was fortunate enough to find in Lord Bute a patron sufficiently liberal to pay the expenses of the publication, leaving him the proceeds. The letter which he wrote to Macpherson himself is: an English reader, among the most curious in his voluminous correspondence. The following is a translation of its principal passages.

"Allow me, Sir," says he, "in common with all Italy to congratulate you on the fortunate discovery you have made of a new world of poetry, and on the precious treasures with which you have enriched literature. You have a special claim to the gratitude of your country, but the world at large must acknowledge itself indebted to you for your travels and your labours. It is to have done something much better than introduce a strange plant, or a rusty medal. I cannot for my own part sufficiently express my delight. Your Ossian has made me all at once an enthusiast. Morven is become my Parnassus, and Lora my Hippocrene. I dream continually of your heroes; I discourse with those children of song; I walk with them from hill to hill; and your rocks crowned with gnarled oaks and perpetual mists, your stormy skies, your roaring torrents, your sterile deserts, your fields covered but with thistles, this grand and

mournful spectacle has more charms for my eyes than the island of Calypso and the gardens of Alcinous. A dispute has been long kept up, and with more virulence perhaps than good faith, respecting the superiority of ancient or modern poetry. Ossian, I believe, will give advantage to the cause of the former, without rendering much aid to the partisans of the ancients. He proves by his example how superior the poetry of nature and sentiment is to the poetry of reflection and wit, which seem to be the property of the moderns. But if it demonstrates the superiority of ancient poetry, it at the same time makes us perceive the defects of the ancient poets, better than any critique. Scotland has shown us a Homer who neither sleeps nor babbles, who is never either coarse or languid, but always grand, always simple, rapid, precise, equal, and varied. But it is not for me to praise Ossian to him, who has rendered his beauties with so much force and exactness that he may be taken for a model. I will rather tell you, Sir, that I am thinking of following your steps, and transferring these poems into my maternal language ; that is to say, into Italian blank verse. Not that I flatter myself with being able to approach the inimitable beauties of this great genius : but I hope by these means to fill my mind more completely with the spirit of my author, and the peculiarities of his style."

Having thus expressed himself, he describes the numerous disputes which had taken place among the learned men of his country respecting the authenticity of the poems in question. The ruling opinion was against the supposition of their antiquity ; and Cesarotti is not sparing of his anger at the prejudices which his erudite contemporaries thus exhibited. "There are, however," he says, "some among them, whose good sense and pene-

tration teach them to regard this dispute with indifference; who would not be sorry to owe to the age in which we live this excellent production, and who would find much more force of mind in a modern who should have been able to transform himself into Ossian, than in Ossian himself."

In concluding this curious epistle, he says, "As for myself, were I permitted to doubt after reading your testimony, I would say, that as I recognise in these poems a grandeur, and a simplicity, which have in themselves the strongest impress of nature, I also find in them an ingenuity of design, an order so delicately irregular, so wise a moderation in the boldest flights, a precision so constant and so fertile, a justice so exact in seizing that precious medium so difficult to preserve, a choice moreover, of objects and characters so delicate and judicious, that the most consummate art appears to have been employed, — an art which knows how to refine Nature without changing her. Whatever may be thought of it, the thing is in every sense wonderful; but modern Great Britain is known to be fruitful in miracles of mind, and it may be permitted to doubt whether Scotland was so in the third century. Whether it be from reason, scrupulousness, or indulgence for the feebleness of others, I cannot refrain myself, Sir, from asking you a question, and I beg you will not think me presumptuous. In good faith, Sir, ought I to admire you as a man full of light and ingenuity, or ought I to revere in you the greatest painter of nature? If it be so, I shall be far from complaining as Scaliger did against Muret. Whether Ossian be ancient or not, he will always be so in style. Those who thus judge cannot be mistaken. However it be, Sir, if my boldness obtain for me the

honour of a reply, I shall feel that I have gained a great deal, and shall glory in it accordingly.”*

Macpherson, in a letter dated London, 4th May, 1763 †, expressed the pleasure he had received from the praises of Cesarotti, and at the same time forwarded him a second volume of Ossian, in the introduction to which the abate would find, he said, arguments sufficient to convince him of the authenticity of the poems. Our author acknowledged the receipt of the present in the most grateful terms, in a letter to Sackville. “I have received,” he says, “the new book of Ossian, together with the English Dictionary, for which you will thank Cargirelli in my name. The principal thing I read is this poem, and yesterday I nearly finished it. It would be useless to endeavour to give a detail of the various beauties of every kind with which it abounds ; whilst to enable you to conceive a just idea of it in general, it is only necessary to say, that it is equal, and perhaps superior, to that other splendid production, Fingal. The characters, the sentiments, the images, the rapidity, the conduct ; in a word, all that which constitutes Ossian the first of poets, abounds in this poem, to a degree more than eminent.” After mentioning the notes and dissertation with praise, he continues : “As far as I am concerned, I shall commence translating immediately, and should be glad to know whether I ought to begin with the dissertation or the poem. With one or the other, I will certainly commence doing something, if it be only for the sake of a beginning.” ‡

In a letter sent him by the Abbé Taruffi, and dated Boulogne, 19th March, 1765, mention is made of the

* Opere, vol. xxxv. pp. 9—14.

† Nota, vol. xxxv. p. 313.

‡ Page 15.

enthusiasm with which his version was received in France. "Your Ossian," says the good abbé, "has a crowd of admirers here. It is a literary phenomenon which astonishes all the curious. Nothing can be more sublime than your versification : it flows with the same noble dignity as its admirable original. We are burning to know if you will translate the third volume which Mr. Macpherson, we understand, has sent you for that purpose. The public has its eyes upon you, Sir, and you must not pause in such a noble career : your generous freedom in attacking ancient prejudices, and that blind veneration for the poet of Achilles, is highly admired. You cannot be reproached as Dacier did De la Mothe for his not knowing Greek, and not being able therefore to judge properly of Homer. You know your Homer by heart ; you are an enlightened Grecian, and yet you fall not on your knees before him." He then mentions that a nobleman of high rank, and an intimate friend of Voltaire, had read his Ossian with transport, and gives him to understand that he may soon expect to hear news in consequence.

In his answer to this letter, Cesarotti requests to know, if Voltaire had received the specimen which he had sent him by Goldoni of the translation of two of his tragedies. In regard to Ossian he says, "I had in truth almost forgotten my work, and I know not if I shall be able to resume it for some time. The task is a laborious one, as you well know, and I have not near so much leisure as it demands." The translation of Ossian was completed in the year 1772, and appeared at Padua in four volumes octavo, accompanied by a long preface, and a considerable body of critical and explanatory notes. The reception it met with was as flattering as the author could desire. With the exception of a few faithful adherents to the

sovereign bards of antiquity, the public expressed themselves in terms of unqualified admiration at the sombre grandeur of northern song. The young and imaginative were enraptured with the poetry itself, but the more temperate and critical were almost equally charmed with the mingled force and elegance of the translator's blank verse. Both the work and the author thus became firmly rooted in the affections of the Italian public. Scarcely indeed had the first part appeared, when Cesarotti was invited by the minister of the Grand-duke of Parma to accept the Greek professorship in the university of that city. Declining this offer, he was immediately after promoted to the united professorships of Greek and Hebrew in Padua.

Happy in the enjoyment of competence and freedom, he laboured from this time till his death with indefatigable diligence. A version of Gray's *Elegy* stands the first on the list of the works now produced ; and next a translation of Demosthenes, in four volumes, with copious notes, which abound, conformably with his general opinions on the subject of the classics, in objections to the author. This work is succeeded by some minor productions, which he wrote in his capacity of Secretary to the Academy of Sciences ; and then comes the twofold translation of Homer, the work by which, next to his *Ossian*, he is best known to the general reader. Not less than ten octavo volumes are occupied with these versions, the former of which is in literal prose, and the latter in verse, but so altered, as to the plan of the poem, by the omission or transposition of various passages, that he thought fit to change its name, and call it not the *Iliad*, but the "Death of Hector." A new "Vocabulary of the Italian Language," the "Lives of the first Hundred Popes," a few minor essays, a poem on Providence, en-

titled "Pronea," a translation of Juvenal, and a long series of letters, form the concluding division of the productions of this active writer, the complete edition of whose works extends to no fewer than forty octavo volumes.

Scarcely an event occurred through the whole of Cesarotti's life to disturb the repose of his studious retirement; and the even temperament of his disposition combined to allow him as much inward as outward tranquillity. "Here are my sonnets," he says, in a letter to one of his friends; "the subjects of them agreeably occupy my mind, without leaving the least trace on my heart:" a sentence which will go far towards making us acquainted with both his personal and literary character. The only circumstances which varied the perfect uniformity of his life after his return to Padua, were a short tour, in which he visited Florence, Rome, and Naples; and the revolution, which in 1797 drew him from the retirement of his villa to become a member of government. He wrote, while in office, "Saggio sugli Studj," and two political pamphlets, intended to quiet the unsettled minds of his fellow-citizens, and which he is said to have regarded, on account of their useful tendency, with more pleasure than any other of his works. About the same time he received the grant of a pension of three thousand francs on the bishoprick of Padua; but of this he was deprived by the return of the Austrians. When Buonaparte, however, again established the authority of France in the States of Venice, he was not only provided for by a new grant, but was raised to the dignity of a commander of the order of the iron crown. Napoleon's admiration of the poems of Ossian is well known; it was through Cesarotti's translation he had become acquainted with them, and his liberal conduct

towards the poet was as creditable to himself as it was grateful to him who experienced it. Reflecting minds will always regard conquerors in a very different light to that in which they are viewed by the vulgar ; but how much would even their feelings of dislike to the name be abridged, did the lives of conquerors exhibit many instances of liberality like those of Napoleon to Cesarotti, and other men of literary eminence ? It is a common observation with historians, that the princes whose names have come down to us emblazoned with renown, are indebted for their fame to the care which they took to propitiate the monks, the only literary men of former days ; and it is not unlikely that, some ages hence, Buonaparte may reap a similar reward for his uniform demonstration of respect to the learning and genius of his times, while not a few of his adversaries will be consigned to the page, or, as it is in those cases, the tomb of history, without any of that lustre being thrown around their names, with which men of letters, fully as fond of their order as monks or nobles, love to decorate the friends of genius, in whatever nation, or century they may have lived. Cesarotti died somewhat suddenly, in November 1808.

In person, he was below the middle height, but strongly formed ; his eyes were of a light blue, bright and sparkling, but not large ; and the general turn of his countenance was more expressive of activity than of depth of thought. Among strangers he is said to have been cold and reserved, but in the company of those whom he esteemed, his conversation was animated, and, on many occasions, brilliant. The kindness of his disposition made him the friend as well as the instructor of the young men under his charge, and his moral example was as valuable to them as his teaching. Fond of the country, and of rural amusements,

he was ever tranquil, virtuous, and contented; and characters occur in the history of modern learning which give a more favourable idea of the retired: of letters, with no ambition but that of occupying a certain rank among those of his calling, and no care that of diffusing knowledge by the best means in power.

IPPOLITO PINDEMONTE.

IPPOLITO PINDEMONTE, the descendant of a noble family of Verona, was born in that city on the 13th of November, 1753.* Endowed by nature with an excellent disposition and promising talents, his genius was fostered by every circumstance that could give it early maturity. His parents had not only sufficient wealth to procure him the most useful instruction, but were themselves distinguished for taste and ability. Their house was the resort of persons celebrated for every species of accomplishment; and, by his association from infancy with society of this description, the mind of the young Ippolito was insensibly imbued with a love of literary pursuits, and of those serene enjoyments, his fondness for which imparts so striking a characteristic to whatever he wrote.

To complete his studies, he was sent to the Collegio de' Nobili at Modena, then known as one of the best conducted seminaries of education in Italy, and where he had the advantage of being placed under the tuition of the learned Cassiani, a man of considerable ability, both as a scholar and a poet.

* Memorie intorno alla Vita, &c. *Antologia di Firenze*, vol. iii. Mario Pieri.

Among the earliest and most valued friends of Pindemonte were Giuseppe Torelli and Girolamo Pompei. Of both these friends he has written an account in his "Elogj," and it seems probable that he derived from them many of his literary tastes and habits. Torelli was profoundly versed in the mathematical learning of antiquity, and had made a translation of Archimedes, in the preface to which he strongly insisted on the value, then almost unknown, of the ancient scientific writers. Before, however, he commenced the study of mathematics, he had been an assiduous cultivator of general literature, had contracted a passion for poetry, and, according to Pindemonte's account, was led to the study of the exact sciences from a sense of perfection, or a poetical passion for pure truth ; so that, observes he, "it would be difficult to decide whether Homer or Archimedes stood foremost in Torelli's estimation, his admiration having been derived from the general principle, that poetry has its own particular truth, and geometry its own particular beauty." Clearness of style, extensive reading, and the graces of a pure morality, were the foundation on which this writer insisted, both by precept and example, that all endeavours after literary eminence should be established ; and Pindemonte imbibed his maxims in a manner which prove how effective they are in practice.

The other intimate friend of our poet, Girolamo Pompei, was equally distinguished with Torelli for his classical taste and erudition. In writing the eulogy of this his early associate, Pindemonte has recourse to a dialogue, which he thus introduces. "I was in Venice," says he ; "and walking one day alone in the garden of Monsignor Patriarca, my mind was wholly occupied with the idea of writing the life or eulogy of Girolamo Pompei. What was my astonishment, when a form suddenly appeared in

the distance, which moving rapidly towards me, I at once recognised to be that of my friend himself. 'How! thou here! Do I not dream in thinking I embrace thee?' were the questions I put to the apparition. 'No! thou dost not dream,' replied the former; 'refrain thy curiosity altogether, and remember that very brief is the time that I may remain with thee'—'Greatly do I rejoice to see thee again. And how opportunely art thou come! I was just preparing to write about thine own dear self, and was striving to recollect the names of thy father and mother, which, notwithstanding our intimacy, have escaped my memory.'—'I was the son of Francesco and Bianca Brenzoni,' rejoined the apparition." After which, in reply to the various questions put by Pindemonte, he detailed the principal events of his literary life, and gives a variety of instructive lessons on the exercise of the poetic art. The conclusion of the dialogue is not uninteresting.

"I congratulate myself," says Girolamo Pompei, "on account of the carelessness with which I left the Casa Marioni on that cold and stormy winter's night without a cloak. It was the cause of my contracting that fatal, but profitable disease, which carried me off in the fifty-seventh year of my age, whereby I avoided all the annoyances of a voyage in old age, and drew quietly into port." Pindemonte replied to this, by lamenting that he had not been allowed the advantage of attending the sick-bed of his friend, in order that he might have learnt from him how to die, as he had learnt from him how to live. But scarcely had he given expression to this sentiment, when the apparition exclaimed, "Who are they who have just entered the garden?" "They are either unknown to me," was Pindemonte's reply, "or the distance prevents my recognising them:" having said which, he turned

towards the place where his mysterious companion stood, but he was gone, and his reappearance was lost for in vain.*

With these men, for whom, as may be seen from above, he entertained the liveliest affection, our author continued the successful prosecution of his studies: his twenty-fourth year, when, seized with the desire of travelling, he set out on a tour through his own country, as preparatory to a more extensive journey. Having visited the principal cities of Italy, he embarked for Sicily, on leaving which he sailed for Malta, whence he departed on a tour in the East.

He commenced this journey with a mind richly cultivated, and pursued it with an increasing appetite for knowledge. Several of his productions are attributed to the delight which he found in travelling, especially his tragedy of "Ulysses," published at Florence in 1778; his "Gibilterra Salvata," his celebrated satire on tourists and some of the most interesting passages in his other works. But he had taxed his delicate constitution beyond its strength in his zeal for observation and improvement. He was obliged, therefore, on his return, to nurse himself in the villa which he possessed near Verona, and from which he wrote to his friends, as one who imagined he had but a short time longer to remain in the present world. His time, he says, was entirely occupied in contemplation, physical and moral truth equally dividing his attention, but each holding such strong possession of his mind, that all his feelings took their mood and colour from his speculations. This, he adds, must inevitably be the case with every man who has the least grain of philosophy in his head, when he finds himself for the

* Opere del Pindemonte, vol. ii. p. 217, &c.

first time free and independent, and enjoying his liberty in the bosom of a green and tranquil retreat. His own humour, he says, might a little incline to melancholy, his weak state of health giving it a more sombre hue; but his melancholy was sweet and unturbid, the presentiment of approaching dissolution enhancing the pleasure of rural repose.*

It was while under the influence of these feelings, that Pindemonte commenced the portion of his works for which a large class of readers will be disposed to give him the greatest praise. He was sensible and learned, and these qualifications enabled him to attempt successfully the imitation of that milder species of satire which began with Horace. But it is in his campestral compositions, in the outpourings of his mind when he lived in solitude, and had nature only for the object of his meditations, that he has left us the best means of judging of him as a poet, or of estimating to what extent he possessed the original inspiration of the muse. His other works remind us of books and of the world; these breathe only the tender, thoughtful spirit of the author, and, for the most part, they inspire a deep and genuine pleasure corresponding to his own.

Having recovered his health, contrary, as it would seem, to his expectations, he felt his passion for travelling return with undiminished force; and, in the year 1788, set out on a tour through the north of Europe. In the former part of this journey he visited Sweden, Germany, and Holland, and in the latter England and France. He remained in London five months, during which he published, in one of the journals, the outlines, from the

* *Le Prose e Poesie Campestri: Avvertimento alla Prima Edizione.*

Odyssey, of eighteen subjects for painting. His taste had long led him to admire English literature, for his acquaintance with which he was probably indebted to his friend Giuseppe Torelli, an ardent admirer of our language ; and, like his fellow-countryman Alfieri, his prejudices in favour of England were not in any way lessened by his residence in the country.

The villas, parks, and rural scenery in general, which met his eye here, called forth his warmest admiration ; and our gardens and landscapes had fully as great a share in giving an English tone to his style as the study of our authors. Alfieri, too, speaks with delight of our tranquil rural scenery ; but his genius was of too turbulent a nature to receive the same advantage from its contemplation as did the gentle, musive Pindemonte. In the same manner, both these poets became enamoured with the beauty of English women : but Alfieri's admiration gave birth to a stormy, licentious passion, which left nothing but disagreeable thoughts in his memory ; while Pindemonte's led to a pure and tender attachment, the recollection of which appears in some of the sweetest and most musical of his stanzas.

In Paris, he spent ten months of that year of trouble, 1789 ; and, strongly excited by the scenes he witnessed, wrote his "Ode on the Sepulchres of the Kings of France ;" a production more elevated in style and sentiment than the generality of his works. Alfieri, as we have seen in the memoir of that author, was in Paris at the same period ; and Pindemonte informed his friend Signor Pieri, that they passed a considerable portion of their time in each other's company, conversing every day on subjects connected with the literature of their own country.

On his return from this tour, Pindemonte travelled leisurely through the different quarters of Italy, staying

for a short period in every place which contained any person from whose conversation he could reap improvement. Thus it is mentioned, that he remained fifteen days in Milan for the sake of his two acquaintances, Parini and the Countess Castiglioni, spending one week with the former, and one with the latter.

Having satisfied his travelling propensities, he returned to Verona, desirous of passing the remainder of his years in quiet. But his country was unfortunately at this period agitated by every species of civil disorder, and there appeared little prospect of its escaping the still greater evils with which it was threatened. Prudence suggested to him the expediency of seeking an asylum in some other country, where he might have less reason to fear interruptions to his repose ; but with a laudable feeling of patriotism, he observed, that a man ought not to abandon his native land when it is in trouble and peril, and that, even as a principle of safe action, it is better, in seasons of agitation, to remain where we may be at the time, than to run the chance of falling into worse dangers by a precipitate flight.* With this feeling, he calmly awaited whatever it might be the fate of his country to endure ; and, in the pleasant retirement of his villa, drew an antidote to fear and uneasiness from study and the exercise of his pen. Much of his campestrial poetry and prose was produced at this period. He now also completed his tragedy of "Arminio," according to the judgment of Cesarotti, one of the finest in the language. His poetical epistles, the translation of the *Odyssey*, and some of his prose compositions, among others the "Elogj" before referred to, filled up the remainder of his time.

A brief period of tranquillity followed the agitation into

* Mario Pieri, art. *Antologia di Firenze*.

which Italy had been thrown by the triumphant arms of the French Republic, and Pindemonte, with nothing to interrupt his solitude, devoted himself more closely than ever to his literary occupations. The subsequent troubles of the country obliged him to leave his favourite retreat among the green hills of Avesa, and he resided alternately at the mansions of the illustrious ladies Elisabetta Mosconi and Isabella Albrizzi. The unfortunate death of the former in 1807 induced him to take up his abode for a considerable part of the year in Venice, or the neighbouring towns of Piacenza or Pavia. But, wherever he resided, he was equally scrupulous in the employment of his time; and, from the year 1795 to his death, he appears, by the date of his productions, to have constantly had some new work before the public.

Pindemonte's ample fortune, the happy disposition of his mind, and the many affectionate companions which his amiable manners secured him wherever he went, afforded him all the supports and comforts necessary to his delicate state of health. Pieri has recorded part of an interesting conversation which he had with him, when, to all appearance, he was rapidly declining. "I ought," he said, "to be more than contented with my state: I have always had, and still have, sufficient for my wants; I passed a brilliant youth (*gioventù brillante*); have travelled with great pleasure, and have experienced no great disasters in the affairs of life. Only one affliction has occurred to interrupt the tranquillity of my days, and this still keeps me in a state of tribulation. I have seen almost all my friends fall off one after the other, and the greater part of them in the prime of their life!"

The conversation in which he thus expressed himself took place some years before his death; but nothing occurred, it is said, to render it inapplicable at the latest

period of his career. With the exception of the uneasiness which he occasionally experienced from the disturbed state of his country, he had but the one affliction above mentioned with which to combat; and to support himself under that, he had all the aids derivable from religion and philosophy, and the consolation of having, though he had lost many friends, still many remaining. Few men, therefore, have passed a happier, or serener life than Ippolito Pindemonte, nor was his death less tranquil than the tenor of his life. The loss of his strength had for some time warned him of approaching dissolution, when Monti, the last of his early associates, was snatched away. His mind from that time was wholly occupied with the contemplation of death. A slight cold hastened its approach, and he expired on the 17th of November, 1828. The affection in which he was held by his fellow-citizens of Verona appeared in the sorrow they exhibited at his funeral. The magistrates, the professors and students of the academy, and every class of the townspeople followed him to the grave, manifesting equal respect for his virtues and his talents.

There are certain minds which, though inferior to those of which the characteristics are great power and originality, nevertheless enjoy a wide command over the regions of thought. Pindemonte's intellectual character was of this class. He was meditative rather than imaginative. The materials of his poetry, even the very sound of his verse, seem to have been the result of reflection. They rarely startle, but they always please and soothe us; they lead us to think that he was seldom astonished, as men of a higher genius not unfrequently are, by the sudden influx of thoughts coming they know not whence, by the vision of things invisible to other mortals, or by flashes of supernatural light instantaneously revealing to the

mind, without an effort of its own, wonders it had never dreamed of. But though the ideas of Pindemonte have not the new light or bloom upon them, which seems to envelope the creations of more original minds, they have all the mild graces of matured beauty. If they may be termed reflections of thought, they are reflections of whatever is holiest and most beautiful in thought; they afford not the delight which the mind feels in having new scenes or ideas presented to it, they give all the pleasure to be derived from the contemplation of those which we are most willing to remember.

VINCENZO MONTI.

THE paternal mansion, in which this celebrated writer first opened his eyes on the world, is situated on the left-hand side of the road leading from Fusignano, a small town of Romagna, to Alfonsine. Fertility and repose are the characteristics of this retired district, and the few rustic cottages which shelter its humble population are embosomed in groves of poplars. The house itself in which the poet was born is a small but neat country seat, rising at the extremity of a beautiful plantation, and arresting the attention of the traveller by its simple porch, and the inscription which it bears from the Psalms, "Deliver me from the oppression of man; so will I keep Thy precepts."* In a little book of family records, Fedele Monti wrote, under the date of February 19th, 1754, "A son was this day born to me. I shall name him Vincenzo."†

Tranquil and happy were the days of the poet's youth. Fedele Monti and his wife appear to have been as perfect examples of piety and benevolence as the world can ever hope to see. Their income was far from large, but

* Psal. cxix. 134.

† Biblioteca Italiana, numero cliv.

there was not a poor person in the neighbourhood to whom their hand or their door was not open. Such was the pleasure which they took in this exercise of charity, that they regarded the affection shown them by the poor as a special sign of the favour of God ; and when they were obliged to remove to Magano, for the education of their children, the absence of those who had been accustomed to seek their alms struck them as an alarming misfortune. They are said to have feared, that they were no longer to be blessed as ministers of good to the suffering ; and the wife, in her simple anxiety, could not refrain from running to the priest to mention her uneasiness.

The benevolence of these admirable people did not go unrewarded. Every one had a prayer and a blessing for them. When Fedele was on his death-bed, his neighbours gathered round him, and divided his last vestments into fragments, that each might possess some relic of their venerable friend. His name was for years after repeated with the deepest affection and reverence, and never perhaps was there a name which had a better right to be remembered and loved.

It was scarcely possible that the example of benevolence thus early set them by their parents, accompanied as it was by every other amiable disposition, should fail of making a lively impression on our poet, and his brothers and sisters. The former always spoke with fond enthusiasm of the happiness which he enjoyed in youth, and of the manner in which his parents inculcated the practice of the virtues for which they were themselves so remarkable. Of all the rewards bestowed upon him, and the other children, for attention to study, the one most coveted was the right of dispensing alms. To the credit of our poet, he often obtained this honour-

able distinction, and not unfrequently allowed his good nature to overcome his judgment in the exercise of his stewardship. It was the custom to admit the poor who came for help at one door, and dismiss them by another; but occasionally the simplicity and kind looks of Vincenzo would tempt some one or two of them to return, as if they had not already applied, and when this was the case, he would look another way, and drop the money into their hands, without seeming to suspect the cheat.

Like many other men of distinguished ability, Monti evinced no signs of talent in his early exercises. He was set in due time to write Latin verses; but, after many efforts, produced such wretched specimens of composition, that his masters despaired of his improvement, and they were at last reduced to the necessity of putting him into a lower class.

Sorely vexed at this disgrace, he secretly resolved to commit the whole of Virgil, line by line, to memory. The expedient succeeded. His power of constructing verses was wonderfully increased; and when his masters again put him to the usual exercises of boys of his age, they were astonished to find that he could write them in very good classical phraseology.

It was not the intention, however, of his father to educate him for any of the learned professions. After, therefore, having kept him at school sufficiently long to acquire the learning simply necessary for a private station, he called him home to take care of the farm. Vincenzo obeyed the summons with sorrow; he had become too fond of study to relish the idea of any other occupation, and his father was soon convinced that he had none of the qualifications necessary to make a successful farmer. Instead of attending to the work going on in the fields, or making the observations which were

necessary to satisfy his father in the evening, he spent the best part of his time with his books, or in composing Latin verses, as at school. Fedele, though an indulgent parent, was not pleased at this habitual negligence of his son in matters of business, and he began to remonstrate with him on the subject.

Conscious of his error in thus neglecting his occupations, Vincenzo formed a resolution worthy of a firmer mind than he ever possessed, either in youth or manhood. Calling his father into his chamber one day, he took all his books from the shelf on which they were ranged, placed them in proper order, and, setting fire to the precious pile, sacrificed the whole of his wealth to his filial duty ! His stoicism, however, forsook him when he saw nothing but the ashes of his books remaining, and he sank, overpowered with grief, into his father's arms. The good old man, pleased with this proof of his son's affection, and at the same time sympathising with him in his sorrow, took twelve gold florins from his pocket, and placed them in a corner where Vincenzo was sure soon to find them. The delighted youth flew without delay to a neighbouring town, where he laid out the money in more than replacing the authors sacrificed.

Fedele Monti having by this time learned that it would be vain to make any farther attempt at suppressing the literary inclinations of his son, prudently resolved upon yielding to necessity, and do all that lay in the power of prudence to obviate the evils which he feared might result from such a disposition. He knew that he could not supply him with the means of independence, and he therefore proposed that he should commence the study of medicine, and thus, while satisfying his thirst for knowledge, qualify himself for a profession. *Nothing*

could be fairer than this proposal, and the young poet was entered at Ferrara as a student of medicine.

But with whatever favourable auspices he commenced his new pursuit, it soon resolved itself into his former studies, and Virgil could hardly be of more use to him in the science of medicine than he had been to him in the fields, and among his father's flocks. Happily for him, his Latin poems, and, soon after, his "*Visione d' Ezechiello*" attracted general notice, and his father was induced to let him change the profession of medicine for that of jurisprudence. His success in this branch of learning would have as poorly repaid his father's anxiety as his former pursuit; but the Cardinal Borghese became his patron, and Vincenzo soon after accompanied him to Rome. There a new career was opened to him. Having written a sonnet in honour of Spinelli, to whom Rome was said to be indebted for its existing tranquillity, he was rewarded with a cameo of Vespasian set in brilliants, the gift of the prelate himself. Soon after, on the discovery of the *Erme* of Pericles and Aspasia, he composed a "*Prosopopœia*" at the request of Ennio Quirino Visconti, whose profound classical knowledge rendered his acquaintance more valuable to our author than his rank and influence.*

Three years passed rapidly away in the society of men of this character. At the end of that time our poet received a letter from his father, desiring him to return to Ferrara. He was on the point of obeying the summons, when his poem "*Sulla Bellezza dell' Universo*" obtained him the honourable appointment of secretary to Duke Braschi, the Pontiff's nephew. In this situation

* Notizie dal Conte Cassi.

he had both leisure and encouragement to cultivate his favourite studies, and he produced in quick succession a variety of elegies and sonnets, the ode "Sul Ballo Aerostatico," the "Amor Pellegrino," and the "Pellegrino Apostolico," the subject of which was the journey of Pius the Sixth to the Imperial Court. But a new era in his poetical career commenced with the arrival of Alfieri at Rome. Invited to hear that celebrated writer read his drama of "Virginia," at the house of Maria Zucchi, his imagination took fire at the grand, concentrated enthusiasm of his style. The applauses bestowed upon him by the persons present, among whom were Tasso's biographer, the Abate Serassi, the Cavalier Puccini, and others, contributed still farther to excite in him a spirit of emulation, and he retired to his apartments with a determination of immediately commencing a drama. It happened that he had been lately reading Pausanias, and his mind was still full of the story of Aristodemus. A tragedy on this subject was quickly in progress, and on its completion the author received a gold medal from the Duke of Parma, whose theatre, at the time of Monti's appearance, had been closed for two years owing to the lack of dramas deserving approbation. The success which attended this, his first attempt, encouraged our poet to proceed, and he soon after produced his "Manfredi," which affords interesting proofs of the deep impression made upon his mind by the study of Shakspeare. Rome resounded with his name at the presentation of these dramas. The first performance of "Aristodemo" produced so lively an impression on the audience, that, on leaving the theatre, people ran in crowds to the residence of the author to shout his praises, and Goethe, who happened to be then in Rome, deeply

impressed with a feeling of his powerful genius, immediately sought his friendship.*

It was while revelling in the happy sensations inspired by this rapid success, that he heard of the death of the celebrated Giovanni Pickler, an artist who would have done honour to the best eras of ancient sculpture, and whose decease involved his family in the deepest trouble and destitution. Monti though personally unacquainted with them, felt the most lively sorrow at learning their distress. The eldest daughter, Teresa, was a young girl of great beauty and accomplishments, but he had never seen her. This was no bar to his romantic design. A few days only had elapsed, when he wrote to offer himself as her husband. The proposal was accepted in the same spirit in which it had been made. Monti was as unknown to Pickler's daughter as she was to him; but his name had already won her regard, and the union which took place almost immediately was consummated by a lasting affection.

The poems which Monti had hitherto produced were purely of a literary character, and it would have been well for his general reputation had he at present composed none of a different kind. But it was scarcely possible that this could be the case living when and where he did. The period was arrived when thought and speculation ceased to be luxuries, and became the common necessities of social life. Literature, which had for ages been but the holiday music of men's minds, was henceforth to be the severe expression of all their daily passions and desires. The whole order of the intellectual world was changed; the shadow was not merely no longer mistaken for the substance, it began to be doubted.

* *Art. Biblioteca Ital.*

and that rightly, whether good, truth, or happiness, can have a shadow.

Times like these were perilous for men of genius. They were now impelled to take a part in public affairs, as well by the circumstances in which they were placed, as by the natural activity of their minds. But neither honesty nor forethought is mentioned in the analysis which metaphysicians give of genius. A man of powerful imagination and eloquence is, in regard to his moral qualities, simply on a par with other men, or above or below them only as he cultivates or abuses his moral feelings. It is not, therefore, altogether extraordinary to find a poet less careful in his conduct, or less honourable in choosing the cause which he should espouse, than we might be led to expect would be the case, if we only kept in view the nobleness of his intellectual powers. The chief cause of Monti's errors, in the first instance, was his not fairly considering the path he might have to tread ; for had he exercised his reason justly, it can hardly be supposed that he would have presented himself as the unsparing censor of principles, of which he was almost immediately after to appear as the laureate.

The production to which these remarks allude is his celebrated poem on the death of Ugo Basville, an individual whose name occupies a conspicuous place in the annals of the French Revolution. He had been one of the editors of the "*Mercure Nationale*," or "*Journal d'État et du Citoyen*," and, in 1792, was sent to Naples in the capacity of "*Secrétaire de Légation*."* In the January of the following year he visited Rome, then the frequent scene of popular tumults ; and on the fifteenth of that month was beset by a mob, who pelted him with

* *Biographie Universelle*; art. Basville.

ies, and drove him into a shop, where he was seized and stabbed. He died in a few hours, and the National Convention immediately entered into an angry controversy with the Court of Rome. In the course of the dispute it was asserted by the Papal party, that Basville, before he breathed his last, had retracted his republican opinions, and expressed his repentance for the part which he had taken in the revolution,—an assertion to which, it seems, there is little reason to give credit. It was on this circumstance, however, that Monti founded his poem, which is written in the style of Dante, and, as a production of the imagination, merits all the praise it has received. Never was the harp of Italy struck with a colder or more skilful hand. The diction, the imagery, the flow of the lines, appear to have been all inspired by that painful intensity of feeling which keeps the mind of the poet awake to those solemn visions at which intellects of a meaner order tremble, or can only endure as they are embodied forth in verse. Like his master, Dante, it was with the language and the condition of beings no longer of the earth that he had to do; and, like him, he had, for the period that his song lasted, the sight and the hearing of a spirit.

A poem of this description could not fail of creating considerable excitement. Men of letters regarded it with wonder, and the author was complimented with the title of “Dante Redivivo.” Parini observed of him, as we have seen, that he constantly appeared in danger of falling, such was the sudden sublimity of his flight, but that he never fell; and persons of profound learning did not disdain to enter upon a controversy to defend the propriety of a single expression of the poem, the “*freddo e caldo polo*.” In consequence of the reputation which he thus acquired, Count di Vilzek, minister plenipotentiary

in Lombardy, offered him the professorship of human literature just vacant in the University of Pavia. But the offer was not at the time suited to Monti's views. Rome could bestow greater prizes than a university.

But the tide of public affairs was now at its height, and Monti, in the midst of his literary and social engagements, received intelligence that Ferrara had become a province of the Cispadana Republic, just established under the auspices of France. With this intelligence he also received a letter from the Count Marescalchi, desiring his presence among his fellow-citizens, and exhorting him to take part with them in the glorious career which they were entered.* The recollection of the "Cantica Basvilliana," of "*La Pugna dell' Inferno*," and "*La temeraria Libertà di Francia*," vanished at the receipt of this invitation, and Monti became a republican.

It was not an idle or a silent assent that he accorded to the principles which he thus embraced. At once giving breath to the ardent passion for liberty so suddenly conceived, he published at Bologna the first canto of the "*Prometheus*," a poem as splendid in its poetical merits as it was inconsistent with the opinions he had formerly advocated. But scarcely had this production been sent into the world, when further changes took place, and he was invited to Milan, and appointed to the office of Secretary-General to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Still, whatever might be the estimation in which the chief members of the government held him, he was regarded by the popular party with extreme suspicion and dislike. A law was proposed by which whoever had written in favour of the priesthood, or of the empire, was declared

* Notizie dal Conte Cassi.

ineligible for any public office. Monti was the special object of this decree ; and the Directory only saved him from the evil consequences of its enactment, by uniting him with the advocate Oliva in the commissariat of the province of the Rubicon. But, whether from his real want of political talent, or from an uncertainty of feeling and disposition, the result of his late conduct, he obtained no credit in his new employment. After a short and vain effort to bear up against the difficulties with which he had to contend, he retired from office in disgust, and accepted the reversion of the professorship then held by the aged Parini. His official proceedings are said to have been marked throughout by the most virtuous integrity, his chief fault in the eyes of his enemies being, that he sought to expose the peculations of some of those with whom he was joined in the management of affairs. So far as the exercise of his pen was concerned, he had laboured hard to merit the praises of the republic. The poems on Fanaticism and Superstition, on the congresses of Udine and Lyons, with some others written at the same period, attest either the ardour, or the surpassing skill, with which he could enter into the feelings of his republican masters. It would be an unjustifiable assumption to assert, that, in all this, Monti played the part of a hypocrite, only doing what he thought was expedient for his own advantage. When he again veered in his opinions, he observed, in respect to his zeal for the republic, "*Sognai d' essere venuto alle nozze d' una bella e casta vergine, e mi sono svegliato fra le braccia d' una laida meretrice.*" "I imagined I had married a fair and chaste virgin ; I awoke, and found myself in the arms of a base harlot." Other similar expressions are on record indicative of his regret at the part he had taken in the above events. "We were sitting one evening,"

says his friend, "in the plantations of the Porta Orientale, and our discourse happening to turn upon the times of melancholy memory, some person present observed, with the view of comforting him, that dark was the period, he had nevertheless gathered in it a most lovely laurel. But Monti shook his head, and held down as a man who repented, and was angry with himself, and then, in an undertone of voice, repeated those lines from his "Aristodemo:"

"I nostri allori,
Di tanto sangue cittadin bagnati,
Son di peso alla fronte e di vergogna."

These our laurels,
Bathed in the blood of slaughtered citizens,
Are but a load and shame upon our brow.*

No situation could be more deplorable than was Monti's on the expulsion of the French from Italy. He was not of them, but he had no means of avoiding sharing in their discomfiture. The part he had taken in blazoning their cause was not sufficient to insure him their respect; but it was more than sufficient to make him feel that the Austrians would not spare him. He was among the earliest, therefore, who passed the Alps, and in his flight he lost most of the little property which he carried with him.† His first resting-place was at Chambery, where he remained several months, and then proceeded with Count Marescalchi to Paris.‡

The account which has been given of his condition in the French capital would scarcely be credible, had it not come, in the first instance, from his own mouth. When he arrived there, his money was already almost exhausted, and as he had no inclination to let his condition be known

* Art. Bibliot. Ital.

† Ibid.

‡ Notizie dal Conte Cassi.

to persons from whom he had little chance of receiving sympathy, he sought an obscure lodging, in which he hid both his fame and his poverty, with a martyr-like resolution, from the world. Friendless and penniless, he was at last reduced to the necessity of walking for miles into the country to gather a meal from the fields or the hedge-rows. Day after day he thus existed, collecting his food in long and weary rambles, and indulging himself in the most melancholy reflections, as he lay down to eat his miserable repast in the first nook that pleased his fancy. These rambles, and the want of nourishment, soon exhausted his strength, and he then found it necessary to carry home some part of the fruit collected one day, to save himself from the fatigue of going out the next. Every hour saw him grow more feeble, and he was at length obliged to betake himself to his bed, with no other idea than that of lying there till he died. But at this juncture his wife arrived from Italy, where she had remained to save their affairs from the total disorder which threatened them on his departure. She brought with her some money, and the pleasing intelligence, that she had succeeded in putting their concerns in tolerable security. Poor Monti lay stretched on his wretched pallet when she entered his apartment, and seemed in the last stage of consumption; but the tidings she gave him, and the cheerful assiduity with which she instantly set about restoring his strength, had the effect of speedily dissipating his melancholy, and he was soon so far recovered in health and spirits, as to be able to leave his obscure lodging, and mix in the society to which his name and reputation would at any time have been a sufficient introduction.

The distress which he had suffered had not impaired his genius. He produced, while in Paris, the poem en-

titled "*Mascheroniana*," to commemorate the death of his friend Lorenzo Mascheroni, a mathematician of eminence; and the tragedy of "*Cajo Gracco*." In both these works he gave vent to sentiments which had little in accordance with those of a French republican minister, and his friends are said to have feared that they would involve him in fresh troubles. No ill consequence, however, resulted from the freedom with which he again declaimed against anarchy, and Napoleon's victory at Marengo restored him, with new hopes, to his country. The universities were no sooner put in order, than he was nominated by the conqueror to a professorship at Pavia, where his eloquent Prælections conferred on him popularity as an orator scarcely less than that which he enjoyed as a poet.

After having passed three years in this employment, he was summoned to the capital, and installed in the office of assessor to the minister of the interior, in all matters relating to literature and the fine arts. By virtue of this station, he became in fact the poet of the court; and few laureates, it must be confessed, have performed their duties with more apparent zeal than did Monti, when singing the triumphs of France and her emperor. So well satisfied, indeed, was Napoleon with his loyalty, that he bestowed on him the still farther dignity of historiographer of the kingdom of Italy, an office to which a stipend but no duties were appended. Thus richly pensioned, he was placed in such easy circumstances, that he could now devote himself to the studies which required a mind free from all meaner cares to accomplish with success. He had some time before commenced a translation of the *Iliad*, and had rendered into Italian the 1st, 2nd, 8th, and 18th Books; but the untoward course which his fortunes had taken soon after

the commencement of the work, put a period for the time to its farther progress. Nothing stood at present in the way of its completion, and the public had the satisfaction of receiving, as the fruit of the emperor's judicious bounty, one of the most brilliant translations of Homer that had been ever executed. The undertaking owed its origin to a conversation which Monti had with Saverio Mattei, at the table of Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo.* According to Mattei, it was impossible for Homer to be translated faithfully, without presenting many low and prosaic passages. This was Cesarotti's opinion; but Monti warmly opposed the dogma of these learned men, translated the books above mentioned in support of his argument, and having so far accomplished his task, obtained the universal suffrages of the public in his favour. That which renders his triumph, and the indisputable excellency of his version, the more extraordinary, is the fact, that he was unacquainted with the language of the original, and, like Pope, translated by means of Latin versions, and the aids which he was able to derive from the voluminous writings of commentators. He had already manifested his skill as a translator by an excellent version of Persius, and his talents as a critic by his letters "*Sul Cavallo alato d' Arsinoe*;" but his *Iliad* placed his reputation on a broader basis. It was said to be like a ring given to Italy, by which its literature was wedded to the literature of Greece.

But while he was thus employed, the political horizon of Italy again prognosticated change, and the portentous signs were scarcely seen, before the troops of Austria planted their standards around Milan. Monti did not this time become an exile. His facile muse, having learnt

* Notizie dal Conte Cassi.

to praise one emperor, deemed it no hard service to praise another, and the professor and historiographer Napoleon hailed the arrival of the archduke to receive the oaths of the Milanese, first, by a poem entitled "*Mistico Omaggio*;" then by another, which bore the title of the "*Ritorno d' Astrea*," and even by a third called an "*Invito a Pallade*." He is said to have written these poems out of gratitude to the Emperor of Austria, for continuing him his pensions; but it is impossible to venerate Monti's genius aright, and not feel mingled contempt and sorrow for the base sacrifice of honesty and truth, of which, in political matters, he was so often guilty.

It is not improbable but that a secret feeling of dissatisfaction with himself on this account, might be the cause of his turning his attention, about this time, from poetry to grammar and criticism. If he had any sentiment of honour or freedom in his bosom, he must, in fact, have inwardly shrunk from the idea of having to write fresh strains of adulation to gratify masters whom another change might oblige him to revile. However this may be, he undertook a revision of the "*Vocabolario della Crusca*." Associated with him in this work was his daughter's husband, Giulio Perticari, a young man of the highest ability, and whose "*Difesa di Dante*" secured him, short as was his career, a permanent station among the scholars of his country.

Thus assisted in his labours, he proceeded happily with his several undertakings, till a severe malady in one of his eyes compelled him to desist for a time from abstruse inquiry. While suffering from this attack he wrote the beautiful little poems published under the general title of "*Sollievo nella Malinconia*;" and which, as well as whatever else he composed at this time, he

dictated to his son-in-law. But, to his deep affliction, he was suddenly deprived of this his constant and affectionate companion, and he could only console himself under the loss by reflecting that his own age and increasing infirmities promised a speedy reunion.

Having satisfied his zeal for the purity of his native language, and the reputation of his great master in verse, by notes on the "Convito," he wrote the "Idyllio alle nozze di Cadmo," and was meditating other poems, when, shortly after retiring to his study, on the night of the 9th of April, 1826, he received a stroke of paralysis which left little hope of his life. Milan, it is said, presented the next morning a scene of general distress, and crowds ran to his house to express their anxiety and grief.

The shock he had received did not prove fatal. Animation and reason returned, and his friends had the satisfaction of seeing him recover sufficient strength to join with them again in the social circle. The last ray of the light which had shone so brilliantly during his protracted career, beamed cheerfully but momentarily forth on his wife's birthday, a day which he had never failed to observe as one of joy and festivity. He lingered two years after his first attack, and died October 13th, 1828. His funeral took place on the 15th. It was his wife's birthday.

THE END.

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